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"BACK, YOU HOUNDS, OR THERE'LL BE SOME DEAD MEN TO ANSWER FOR," SHOUTED HAL.

Prince Hal,

THE RATTLING DETECTIVE;

OR,

Pat Lyon, the Master Locksmith.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE DAISY DETECTIVES," "THE WHITE SHEIK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

HOW PAT TOOK DOWN A HIGH-TONED CUSTOMER.

It was an old mansion. A century or two seemed to have trodden over its moss-grown roof. Its walls, built of alternate black and red bricks, were in the fashion of a past age.

Yet it was strong, firm and hearty, as if it was a work of yesterday.

The carved panels of the doorway, the arched window-tops, the breadth and squareness of the mansion, showed that it had been in its time a stately dwelling of the blue-blooded aristocracy.

Yet the clear hammer-ring that now came through its open windows proved that it had gone down-hill in dignity. It was now the workshop of one of the bare-armed mechanics of the Quaker city.

The sound of the hammer was not necessary to show this. For over the arched doorway ran a sign with the inscription in broad, black letters:

"PAT LYON, LOCKSMITH."

And below it, depending from the arch of the door, hung a swinging lock, destined to attract the attention of the passers-by to the business of the occupant.

Let us pass under the swinging lock and enter the mansion from whose inner rooms comes that clear music of the hammer.

There is a broad hall, and then a door leading into a large, square room, which, by its richly-carved mantle and cornices, seems to have been one of the grand rooms of the old mansion.

But everywhere about it now are seen the signs of a locksmith's business. Great bunches of keys, of every size and shape, hang from the wall. Locks, large and small, cover a row of shelves behind the counter. Sheets of metal, files, vises, wire, chain, brass knockers, and everything necessary for the business of locksmithing, are there in profusion.

For these were the days when mechanics had to know and practice every part of their trade, and had to be able to turn their hands to fifty different duties.

They did not simply buy and sell factory-made goods, as is so largely the case now.

Behind the counter stood a stalwart, broad-shouldered man, of middle age, file in hand, and busily engaged in finishing a blank key that was clasped tightly between the iron jaws of a strong vise.

He was a man of clear eyes and firm, resolute face, with a look of dignity on his countenance as of one who felt himself the equal of any man in the city.

A short-cut, iron-gray whisker covered his well-rounded chin. His lips were firmly set as he steadily worked. A leathern apron encircled his waist. On his bare arms the muscles stood out like whip-cord. It was evident at a glance that Pat Lyon would have been an awkward load to handle.

And this was a fact that the roughs of the city, a generation ago, very well knew. More than once some of them had tackled the stalwart locksmith and had "dropped him like a hot potato." They had come to the conclusion that Pat was a splendid fellow to let alone.

Yet it was not from the locksmith that came that hammer-ring which had sent its music into the street. In the rear of the salesroom was a door that opened into another room back. Here could be just seen the flash of a fire.

And as the hammer sent out its musical clang, it was accompanied by a snatch of a popular song, rolled off in a clear tenor voice, and in a lively fashion that spoke of young and gay blood.

Pat rested a moment and listened to the voice of the singer.

"What a light-hearted young rattler he is!" he remarked, without a trace of the Irish accent that might have been expected from his name.

"Who would think that he was just clear of a scrape that might have sent him to the lock-up but for his soft-hearted master. And here he is trolling away as if he had spent his life rolling in daisies! I doubt if there is such another wild rogue of a 'prentice in Philadelphia. I am not doing my duty by him, that's clear, letting him off so easy from his larks. But the dog has the trick of getting 'round me, and taking all the pith out of my discipline. Well, well, I fear I was born with too soft a vein. I haven't backbone enough to manage that rattling rascal."

He was interrupted by a customer who just then entered the door of the shop.

Dropping his file and brushing the iron-dust

from his hands, Pat stood upright behind his counter, as dignified in his leather apron as a king could be in his royal robes.

The customer was a well-dressed man, with a proud bearing and a haughty face. His eyes were fixed on Pat with a look of supercilious condescension which the honest locksmith did not like.

"Mr. Lyon, I believe?" he queried.

"Pat Lyon, at your service," answered the locksmith. "I never swing a handle to my name behind the counter."

"You deal in locks and keys?"

"Aren't you wasting words?" asked Pat, shortly. "Your eyes might have told you that."

"There, there, my good sir, there is no occasion to be touchy," answered the gentleman, with a look of haughty disdain. "I have been recommended to you as an expert locksmith. I wish to employ you in an affair of some importance. That is, if you think you can handle it."

"I fancy I can handle 'most anything in the way of my trade," answered Pat. "Hot iron is about the only thing I let drop."

"I have no doubt you think so," replied the gentleman. "But this is no ordinary case. What I want will need no common skill. The fact is that one of our city banks has lost the key to its vault. All its cash is locked up and its business brought to a standstill. And the worst feature is that the lock is a skillful piece of mechanism that I fear no mortal hand can pick."

"It is a special job, made by Lamson, the celebrated English locksmith, and warranted to defy the picklock."

A dry laugh came from Pat's lips.

"A Lamson lock, eh? And you think it's past picking?"

"I fear that nobody but the maker could open it without the key."

Pat turned his face toward the door of the room and called out:

"Hal!"

"Ay! ay!" came the answer, in a clear-toned voice.

"Drop your hammer and step here a minute."

"That suits me," was the lively reply.

The next moment Pat Lyon's 'prentice stood in the doorway of the workshop.

He was a tall, well-built young fellow, of about twenty years of age. Though at first sight he seemed of slender build, a more observant eye saw signs of strength in the swelling chest and shoulders and muscular arms. And there was a look of lightness about his frame that betokened the agility of a deer.

On his firm neck stood a well-poised head, covered with short curling brown hair. This dropped somewhat over the forehead of a very handsome face, brown-skinned, bright-eyed, and overflowing with life and spirits. He looked just the rattling, heedless, good-natured, whole-souled fellow to whom Pat's late words would apply.

And such was his reputation. Harry Prince, or Hal the Prince, as he was familiarly known, was the leading spirit of the Philadelphia apprentices, the life of sport and the center of mischief, and always ready to follow a day's work with a night's frolic, and to enter into any adventure that offered, without stopping to think of the consequences.

"See here, my boy," cried Pat, as the 'prentice advanced with his free step. "I've a nut for you to crack. A bank vault, with a Lamson special lock, and the key lost. This gentleman says it can't be picked. What say you to that?"

Hal looked from the locksmith to his dignified customer. He seemed to take in the measure of the latter at a glance. A quizzical look came upon his face.

"Don't ask me to pick it," he replied. "That is, if you don't want your cash to get rusty, before you handle it."

"That is not to the point," answered the gentleman, dryly. "The question is, can Pat Lyon pick that lock?"

"Maybe so, and maybe not. A good way to find out is to try," rejoined Hal, with a careless shrug of his shoulders. "I wouldn't like to say what I can do myself, and I don't calculate to carry anybody else's sins on my shoulders."

"Then you doubt his ability?"

"All I have to say is," answered Hal, promptly, "that we don't sell brag in this shop. If you want to find what Pat Lyon can do, plank down the cash and put him to work. That's the best way to prove the pudding. If you want a straighter answer, I'll say this much more:—It may be that there's the man living that can make a lock that Pat Lyon can't pick, but if you show me that lock, I'll engage to eat it, tumblers and all.—Anything more?"

"That will do," answered Pat, with a satisfied smile.

Hal turned on his heel and walked back to his work, as if he felt he had said his say.

The gentleman gazed after him with a look of curious interest.

"Who is that young man?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Hal Prince, my 'prentice."

"A spry and a sharp fellow. And impudent enough for two. But that is not to the point. The fact is that the vault of the Drover's Bank is fast, the key is lost, and it is beyond our power to open it. We do not want to break in the door with sledges, but they say that no mortal hand can pick a lock of that make."

A smile of amusement passed over the locksmith's intelligent face.

"You heard what the lad said?"

"Yes."

"Well, he meant it, every word."

"How much do you want for the job?"

"A hundred dollars."

"A hundred fiddlesticks! If you can do it at all, you can do it in a few hours. Twenty will pay you well, and that is our limit."

Pat let fall his apron, which he had rolled up in his hand. He picked up his file again.

"You'd best try the sledges. They're the surest picklocks," he said, as he resumed his filing.

"Come, come, my good man. No nonsense. Business is business."

"That's my notion," said Pat. "I have wasted a dollar's worth of time in talk. I have this key to finish."

"There is no use to waste words. I'll make it thirty. And that's princely pay."

"Best sledge it in. That will save time. And you can put in a door for a couple of hundreds."

The gentleman cast a look of anger on the obdurate locksmith. Then he walked with a sturdy step to the door, and into the hall, as if expecting to be called back. But Pat's file gave out its sharp sound. From the rear room came the clash of Hal's hammer. The customer seemed forgotten. He turned back with a spiteful look.

"But, my good man, this is ridiculous. Think a moment. You are forgetting yourself."

"That's a fact," answered Pat. "I did forget something."

"I thought so. I knew you would come to reason. Now name your figure."

"One hundred and twenty-five."

"What?"

"I forgot something," answered Pat. "It is worth more than I thought. That figure is my limit."

The gentleman stamped with impatience and anger. Pat had taken all the stately dignity out of him.

"That is utterly ridiculous," he ejaculated.

"Either you are an idiot, or you think I am. Do you think I am going to let any common mechanic fleece me that way? I will pay you fifty, and that's the utmost. You have taken leave of your senses. Try if you cannot come back to reason."

"Maybe you're right," answered Pat, quietly.

"Maybe I have been a little hasty."

"Of course you have."

"That's so. It will be a bigger job than I thought. A Lamson special. It's worth a cool hundred and fifty. Fifty down, and a hundred when the job's done. That's my limit."

"The deuce! Hang it, sir—" The gentleman paused, and mopped his red face with his handkerchief. "Anything so preposterous I never—" He paused again and looked at Pat's face. Something he saw there changed his tune. "I give in. It's a bargain. Hang it, if the man won't raise ten dollars a minute on me if I stay longer! Bring your tools and come with me. My carriage is at the door. There is not a minute to lose."

"All right," said Pat, quietly, as he whipped off his apron, picked up a basket, and began to select the necessary tools. "I've only got one thing further to say, sir, and it may be well for you to remember it. The next time you step into an honest mechanic's shop, just leave your haughty ways behind you. Remember that there are gentlemen in leather aprons as well as in broad-cloth coats, and that a smith may be as proud of his business as a bank president. You've given fifty dollars now for your 'good man' and 'common mechanic' talk. If you'd tried any more airs I wouldn't have done the job for all your money."

He continued to select his tools, while his visitor stood with a crestfallen look, as red as a boiled beet in the face. He looked like one who had been sadly "taken down."

"Hal!"

"Ay! ay!"

"I may be away for hours. At the Drover's Bank. I leave you in charge. And, hark ye, no mischief. You understand me."

"That's all square," answered Hal, easily. "I'll keep things level. I've given up mischief."

Pat looked dubiously on his reckless apprentice, as he followed the gentleman from the shop.

Hal looked after him with an odd smile.

"He thinks he can't trust me. And maybe I am a bad one to be left alone. It seems to me I've got a touch of Fourth of July in my veins just now."

CHAPTER II.

HAL PRINCE AND HIS VISITOR.

THERE was nothing in Hal Prince's actions to show that he could not be trusted. The sound

of the carriage wheels no sooner gave token that the locksmith and his customer were gone, than the 'prentice closed the shop door, adjusted a bell so that it could not be opened without giving warning, and went quietly back to his work in the rear room.

"Got to finish that job, anyhow," he muttered. "No true mechanic leaves a job half done for a holiday. And I calculate to make a mechanic before I graduate."

The rear room was fitted up with a forge and blacksmith's bellows, with anvils and hammers, and with everything else necessary for the conversion of crude iron into locks and keys.

Hal had a sheet of iron in the fire, which he had been flattening and shaping on the anvil. Seizing the bellows, handle he soon had the fire roaring again, and the iron at white heat.

In a few minutes he had the iron on the anvil and was wielding the hammer with a skill and quickness which showed that he had not much to learn in that department of his trade.

The youthful mechanic was a very handsome fellow, as he stood there, his graceful figure swaying lightly to every movement, his bared arms as shapely as a woman's, yet as strong as a smith's, his carelessly-tossed and curly hair surmounting the well-rounded head, and the face with its attractive features.

He seemed a true modern Apollo as he stood there at his work, an Apollo of the hammer and forge, not of the bow and lyre.

Yet there was a touch of the wild and reckless in Hal's blood. There was none of the Quaker steadiness about him. Adventure was the breath of his life, and he would have been at that moment more at home in the wildwood than bound in within those four square walls.

As he hammered away he broke out again into a rollicking song, keeping time with the music of the anvil.

In a half-hour his job was finished. Away went hammer and iron. Springing lightly from where he stood he leaped to the surface of the anvil, flapped his arms and gave vent to a cock-crow, so natural that one would have sworn a genuine Dorking was there.

"What's in the wind now? I'm spoiling for a bit of fun. It's getting as dry here as dust in August."

At that moment the bell at the shop door rung loudly, and steps sounded in the adjoining room.

"Hillo, the shop!" came in a loud, cheery voice. "Fetch out that cock-o'-the-walk, and I'll match him for a shilling a side."

"Two to one he makes your feathers fly in the wink of a mosquito," sung out Hal, as he sprang through the door. "And here he is, for fun or fight. How goes it, Jerry? And what are you doing off duty at this time o' day?"

The person spoken to was a short, square-set youth, dressed in a suit of rough cloth, and with his jacket swung carelessly over his shoulder. He was yet a boy, yet there was an old look on his face and an expression of the eye of a doubtful character.

"I heard that game-cock crowing," he said, with a grin, "and I knowed the old rooster must be away."

"The deuce you did! I calculate you think I'd be afraid to crow if he was here?"

"I know I would, if my boss was around. If I tried that on at work, I'd get the measure of his boot-sole in a jiffy."

"Pat Lyon isn't that sort. If he was I'd discharge him and hire another boss on the spot. When I get Old Tom in me he's got to come out, if there was a shipload of bosses around."

"You're a jolly coon, Hal," answered the other, with a look of admiration. "Wish I had half your spunk. But come, old lad, there's fun afloat. There's a break-down at our shop, and all the boys are off. We're streaking out for the pigeon match, back of the Traveler's Rest. Can't you drop shop, and toddle along?"

Hal looked as if he would have dearly liked to, but he shook his head.

"Isn't in the wood. It's working hours now."

"Oh, let up on that! Pat's away, you say. Come ahead. There won't be any fun without you. You can easy square it up with him. Everybody says you twist the old coon round your little finger."

"Do you know why?"

"Not I."

"It's because I'm always on the square. Pat's as easy as an old shoe when he sees a fellow trying to do his duty. But let a chap go criss-cross with him, and I bet he'd find it worse work than trying to split a gum-tree log with a hoe-handle."

"Oh, stuff! You can call the girl out of the house to keep an eye open on the store. Pat needn't know anything about it. She'll lie for you till the skies are green."

"She won't till I ask her," answered Hal, seating himself on the counter, and closing his lips with a resolute air.

"You don't know what you're losing. The Joker's to be there, with his old stub and twist. And he bets he can drop twenty birds out of twenty-five shots."

"Let him," answered Hal, coolly.

"I'll be shot if I ever saw you quite so cow-

ardly," cried Jerry, striding the floor impatiently. "The boys say that Hal Prince don't care a fig for man or monkey, and I never thought you'd be the chap to let a bit of prime fun go by for fear of a blow-up or a boot-strap."

"Didn't you?" asked Hal, indifferently. "I suppose we've all got to live and learn."

"But hang it, lad, if you are afraid of the boss, what's the odds in that? Whistle the girl in, give her the cue, and he'll never know a whiff of it. Just think of the fun there'll be at the match, and nothing under the sun to hold you here, as I can see."

"There's one thing you can't see. You haven't the right sort of eyes."

"What's that?" asked Jerry, quickly.

"It's only a kind of air-rope; one of the sort that no one can see or touch, but it hangs like a chain cable."

"I'll be fuddled if I know what you're driving at. What kind of a queer rope is that, anyhow?"

"It's the rope of honor, Jerry. Do you understand, you cross-grained tempter? I am here on honor. Do you think I would break my word for a pigeon-match, if there were five thousand birds, and fifty dead shots? See here, young man. Pat Lyon knows me. If he tried bossing with me he'd find me the hardest nut he ever tried to crack. But put me on my honor and I'm there. There's not enough sport in the universe to drag me from my post."

"Thunder! I thought you had more life in you."

"Did you?" queried Hal, with a curl of the lip.

"S'pose you were called out on business?"

"That's a different affair. There honor pulls the other way."

"Well, stick to it, if you're going to play milksop. You bet I'm not going to lose the match to suit your notions. Good-day. I'll tell the boys how Hal Prince is turned Methodist."

He gave an irritating laugh as he turned to the door.

Hal's eyes flashed, and his fists closed with a threatening movement. It was evident that his blood was getting warmed up.

"Stick to business, that's what the Bible says," continued Jerry. "I'll tell you how the match went, and bring you a Sunday-school tract when I come back."

He slipped out in a hurry. He had just caught sight of Hal's face, and concluded that it would be wise to disappear.

He was just in time. Hal had jumped from the counter to the floor. If his tormentor had stayed a minute longer he might have gone out with a boot toe to help him.

He stood breathing heavily for a minute. Then he broke into a grim laugh.

"I'm a fool to let such a puppy rile me. But there'll be a row between Jerry Bounce and me yet. I feel it brewing. I never more than half-liked him, anyhow. He brags on his muscle and his science, but if he wakes me up I bet he smells brimstone."

Hal bustled about the shop, clearing up and putting things in their places. He was too much out of temper to keep still, and had to work the steam off somehow.

A half-hour finished this job. Then he flung himself on a stool, stretched out his legs and began kicking the floor with his heels.

"They must be rattling away at the pigeons now," he said, discontentedly. "I'd give a cow to be there. What brought that sour-eyed fool in here, anyhow? I'd never have thought of it only for his slack."

Another half-hour passed. Hal was getting bluer with every minute.

He started up as he heard a whistle in the street and the sound of a step in the hall. The shop door opened, and Jerry Bounce again made his appearance.

"Ain't mad yet, Hal?" he asked.

"When I want to get mad I'll pick out a better-looking chap than you."

"Well, you had the most sense, anyway. I tramped clear out there for nothing. The match is off, and all the boys scattered. It's a sell right through."

"Serves you right, for your slack."

"Oh, I didn't mean anything by that. Thought I'd come back and have a chat with you."

"For want of better fun?"

"No. Just because you looked so all-fired lonesome. It's been working on my conscience ever since I left that door."

"If you hadn't left when you did you'd had something else on your conscience."

"I know that," said Jerry, with a laugh. "You were mad enough to chew iron."

But we must cut off this conversation. Hal was too good-natured to hold to his spleen against his companion, and in a little while the pair of 'prentices were chatting away like the best of friends.

They were interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of a customer. This was a boy of about sixteen years of age, and looking impudent enough for two of his age.

"Well, youngster, what's the word?" queried Hal.

"Some feller wanted from this shop, that's

all," answered the messenger. "Pieced down Fourth street. Dunno what's up. Somethin' out of order 'bout a lock. But they're in a prime old hurry, and made me skeat."

"Where is it?" asked Hal.

"Here's the number. Made 'em write it down fear I'd furgit it. That's what I'm best at—furgitting."

"You're a sweet, parrot-toed young angel, but I don't think I'll fly down that way just now. Nobody at home but me, and I can't leave till six o'clock. There's your report. You can slide with that."

"You bet there'll be ructions if I fetch back this news. Why, these is high-toned big-bugs, and when they says a thing they means it. You jist got to go."

"I have, eh?"

Hal failed to catch a meaning wink that passed from Jerry to the boy.

"There's money in it, plenty o' that. You kin charge like wax. They're jist rollin' in gold-dust."

"Now, you get, youngster," answered Hal, impatiently. "You've got too much gab for a boy of your size. Tell them I'll come after six o'clock. If that won't do they can hunt somebody else. Slide now, while your boots are warm."

"I'll git my back warm if I fotch that back fur an answer."

"Oh, go ahead," cried Jerry, impatiently.

"I'll tend the place while you're gone. You said awhile ago that honor and business were the same thing. Leave me here, and go do the job."

Hal looked at him inquiringly.

"You won't streak off on the scent of a pigeon-match, or a cock-fight, and leave the place to run itself?"

"If I do you can lick me the next time you see me."

"You bet I will," ejaculated Hal. "And when I say that I'm not talking Greek."

He selected an assortment of tools, and put them in his pocket.

"All right, young'un. I'm going. Toddle along now."

"You got the directions," answered the boy.

"I ain't done my jobs yit. Got to streak off t'other way. You'll find the folks at home, and the job a-waitin'. And I bet you come back in a holy humor."

He was off like a shot in the opposite direction, leaving Hal to make what meaning he would out of his last remark.

The worthy 'prentice paid little attention to it, however, but strode off down the street, satisfied that he had done his duty by his employer in every particular.

"I'm a little dubious about Jerry Bounce," he muttered. "But if he don't keep his word I'll bounce him. That's some comfort. He's the worst egg in the whole crowd of 'prentices."

The locality to which he had been sent was a long distance from the locksmith's establishment. At least more than two miles.

But Hal's light step and free swing soon carried him over the ground.

Seeking the number he found himself in front of a stately mansion, with high, brown-stone steps and marble base.

Stepping quickly up, he rung the bell.

A few minutes brought a colored servant to the door.

"I have been sent for to fix a lock in this house. Will you show me where it is?" asked Hal.

"Dunno what you mean. Nothin' ails de locks here," answered the dandy, with dignity.

"Ain't this the place?" demanded Hal, showing his directions.

"Yes. Dat's 'um, sure," answered the servant. "But der ain't nothin' ails no locks here. I know dat."

"Suppose you save your tongue and use your legs. That's the best way to find out," exclaimed Hal, impatiently. "I reckon that the folks that sent for me knew what they were about, even if they didn't take you into it."

The servant was on the point of giving an angry answer. But evidently thinking that the visitor must be right, he changed his mind, and asked him in. Ushering him into a reception room, he left him there while he went back to inquire.

Hal looked around him. He found himself in an elegantly-furnished apartment, with crimson-covered chairs and sofas, rich Brussels carpet, lace curtains to the windows, and such splendor as was seldom seen in the mansions of that period.

"My, if that ain't 'most enough to take a chap's breath!" ejaculated the surprised 'prentice. "It's just the toniest place I ever got chipped into. I'd like to sit down, but 'twouldn't never do on them chairs. They're a long touch above my style."

Several pictures on the wall now attracted his attention. He stepped forward to examine them more closely. They were landscape scenes with the exception of one of small size, which seemed a portrait.

Whatever it was, it took Hal's attention suddenly and completely. Anything so beautiful as that face he felt it had never before been his lot to see. The small, beautifully-curved mouth, the proud arch of the nostrils, the pearl-like

ears, the clear blue eyes, that seemed actually gazing on him from the canvas, the whole face, at once tender, delicate and proud, took his fancy as it had never before been taken.

He drew a long breath as he continued to gaze in that enchained manner.

"I thought it wasn't in my bones to fall in love," he muttered. "But I couldn't stand much of that sort of thing."

He was aroused from his reverie by a voice behind him.

"Are you the locksmith that says he was sent for?"

He turned. There stood a richly-dressed lady.

"Yes, ma'am. Here are my directions."

"There must be a mistake," she replied, looking at the paper. "There is no work to do here. Who came for you?"

"An impudent young rascal of a boy."

"I don't understand this. You are not wanted here. You have been deceived in some way."

Hal looked at her in surprise. What did this mean?

CHAPTER III.

A MILL AT CLOSE QUARTERS.

A FEW minutes found Hal again in the street, on his way back to the shop. He was in a very odd frame of mind. He had been sent out on a fool's errand, and if he had got hold of that boy just then he would very likely have taught him a lesson in gymnastics.

He thought at first that he must have received the wrong directions. But there were the name and number both on the paper. That idea wouldn't work.

Then he began to fancy that there must have been some scheme to get him out of the shop. It was not the first of April, for a fool's trick to be played on him.

Another thought soon drove these fancies out of Hal's busy brain. There came into his head the memory of the picture he had seen, with its sweet and charming face.

"Whew!" he whistled. "It was enough to take a chap's breath. I don't think I'm very soft-hearted, but that girl's face was as sweet as honey on toast. Wonder who she was? She ain't a mite like the old lady that I had the chat with."

He walked on in a sort of dream, as if he had been touched in a tender spot.

"I bet high I'm making a Jack of myself," he said at length. "The picture may be as old as the hills. The girl may be a grandmother now; or she may have died a hundred years ago. A chap might as well fall in love with a turnip as with a picture."

That was very good philosophy, yet he did not find it easy to get the picture out of his head. That charming girl-face haunted him.

He was returning by a different route than the one by which he had come.

He suddenly stopped in surprise as his eyes fell on a building before him. Through its open windows came the sounds of busy labor.

"Why, what did that rascally galoot mean when he said the shop was closed and all the hands on a holiday? Was he trying a sell on me? Hallo, Rubel!"

This call was to a boy at a window.

"Hallo, Hal!"

"How's this? Jerry Bounce told me the place was shut down for repairs."

"Guess it's him that is shut down," answered the boy. "He got bounced by the boss. That's what's the matter. Got a boot under his coat-tail for impudence and laziness. Jerry's a bad egg."

"If he is I'll smash his shell," exclaimed Hal, in a rage. "So he's toddling 'round working sells on me, is he? He wants a currycomb in his back hair, and I'm just the chap to accommodate him."

Hal hurried angrily on, fuming and fretting over the double sell that had been played on him. And he was not quite easy in his mind. Was there something worse than a lark? Was something wrong at the shop?

His quick step hastened into a run as he went on. He had been tricked. Was Jerry Bounce at the bottom of it? It would not be the first dirty trick he had been caught in.

Hal's trot broke into a lively run as he advanced. He went over the return route in less than half the time that it had taken him to go out. Ere long he found himself within sight of the locksmith's establishment.

To his surprise and alarm he saw that the shutters were closed. A minute more showed him that the door was also closed. He tried it. It failed to yield to his touch. It was locked.

Hal paused a moment, scratching his head. He was in a quandary. What was to be done? Placing his ear to the shutter he was able to hear some faint sounds within.

"Ha!" he cried, with an air of satisfaction. "Whatever's going on it's not through yet. That's rich papers. So they thought they'd keep out customers by turning the key, did they? I bet high I'll have a hand in the fun."

He darted quickly away to where a fence inclosed an unimproved lot. Over this fence he went with the lightness of a cat. Running quickly forward, he bounded over another fence and found himself in a narrow alley.

A short distance along this brought him to a gate, which he opened with a key that he took from his pocket. In a moment more he was in a square yard in the rear of Pat Lyon's workshop.

There was a door before him, closed and fast. Precautions had evidently been taken to prevent intrusion. But the rascals forgot they had a locksmith to deal with. Hal took a small instrument from his pocket, inserted it at the key-hole, and gave it a skillful twist. The bolt of the lock moved noiselessly back. He cautiously pushed open the door and entered.

He found himself in the room in which he had recently been working. But a glance showed him that a hammer and chisel had gone from where he had laid them an hour or two before. And from the front room there came the sound of voices in a subdued tone.

Hal drew near to the communicating door, which stood a crack open. A grim smile marked his lips. He felt like astonishing the gentlemen, whoever they were, that were at work in the front room.

He leaned against the door-sill listening to their talk.

But at this moment the voices ceased, and there came a crackling sound.

It was repeated. It resembled the splitting of wood.

"Here. Hold the chisel till I give it a pull. This must be the spot, according to the map."

Hal smiled more grimly than ever. That was the voice of Jerry Bounce. His fists closed in a threatening fashion. But what was going on? His curiosity was almost unbearable. He pushed the door slightly further open.

"Ain't you 'feard the guy 'll come back?" asked a voice which Hal recognized as that of the boy messenger. "We've been browsin' all round, and ain't hit nothin' yit. It's gittin' kinder monotonous."

"It is, eh?" muttered Hal, fiercely. "We'll see if you can't be cured of that complaint, young man."

"No trouble about him," answered Jerry. "He ain't much more than there yet. We've got a good fifteen minutes."

"My, didn't I do it up prime?" replied the boy. "And send him larkin' down t'other end o' nowhere. Won't old Miss Perkins go fur him lively? She's allers afeard o' somebody stealin' her silver spoons."

"Look out he don't pay you up."

"Him nab me? That galoot? He might as well try to ketch a 'skeeter in a flour barrel."

This was almost more than the listener could stand. He was on the point of flinging open the door and springing into the room, when he was stopped by a repetition of the crackling sound.

"Somehow I guess this must be the spot. If we can strike that paper it will be worth a cool hundred apiece to us. Here's a hollow behind this board. Let me have another squint at that map."

"What's the paper 'bout, anyhow?" queried the boy. "Must be wu'th a blazin' lot, or they wouldn't never shell out that way."

"I don't know any more than the man in the moon. They say it's been hid for near a hundred years. Looks like this spot on the map."

They were so intently engaged that they failed to notice a light step on the floor, and did not discover that a lithe, tall form stood behind them, looking over their shoulders.

They had their eyes fixed on a sheet of yellow, discolored paper, or parchment, on which was drawn in ink a rude diagram. It was partly faded out, and was so dim that it was not easy to follow its lines.

"Whoever drew that didn't know much about his business," said Jerry, impatiently.

"This place looks like the mantle-piece," answered the boy. "Guess we'd best hurry up 'fore that there guy gits back."

"I wouldn't be in a hurry if I was you!" came a mocking voice behind them. "Give me a squint. I used to know something about maps."

As these words were spoken a hand reached over Jerry's shoulders, and quietly took the diagram from his unnerved hand.

The pair of young rascals started back in dismay and astonishment, their eyes as wide open as if they had seen a ghost.

"Hal Prince!" ejaculated Jerry.

"Got back!" exclaimed the boy.

"Guess so," answered Hal, dryly. "Been kind of busy, haven't you?" He pointed to the carved framework around the chimney, which had been torn loose with hammer and chisel. "My! won't Pat Lyon give you a shilling for your Christmas box when he sees that?"

As he spoke the two young villains were looking around like caged foxes, as if seeking a hole out of a very tight place.

The boy stooped into a crouching attitude, ready to make a spring for freedom. Jerry, whose face burned with rage and disappointment, had his eye fixed on the hammer which he had left on the mantle.

Hal stood before them, vigilant of eye, yet with a look of mockery on his face, as he folded up the captured paper and placed it in his pocket.

"This is about as good as a pigeon-match, ain't it, Jerry?" he asked.

Jerry snarled something in reply.

"We can't pick pigeon, but I guess we can pick crow. Don't be in a hurry, youngster. I'll tell you when to go."

The boy had at that moment made a dart for the door. With an agile leap Hal had him by the collar, flung him like a twig to the floor, and set his foot on him.

"Now, Jerry. Just square yourself. I calculate to give you a sort of boxing lesson."

A look of mingled rage, fear and cunning was on Jerry's evil face. At that moment, with a fox-like spring, he bounded toward the mantle, and made a quick snatch for the hammer that lay there.

But Hal had not lost sight of him for an instant. Quick as he was the agile 'prentice was before him, and had seized the dangerous weapon, which he flung to the other side of the room.

"It won't work, Jerry. I've got it in my craw to give you a salting. If you can whip me, all right. But we're going to see who's the best man."

He caught as he spoke a chain that lay on the mantle, with a hook at each end. Ere Jerry knew what was up Hal had fastened one hook in his coat-collar, and the other in his own.

The chain between brought them within three feet of each other.

"Face the music, Jerry. No doubles and turns this time. Fist and foot, and no quarter till somebody flings up the sponge. Keep down there, you rat!"

This was to the boy, who had been slyly crawling to his feet. A stroke from Hal's knee sent him to the floor, and he set his foot on him again.

It was an interesting scene. There stood Hal, erect and agile, his handsome face full of indignation. One foot held down the squirming boy, who seemed too much scared to make any strong effort to escape. Before him stood Jerry, with his short, squat form, and the evil look in his eyes now strongly shown. And between them was the chain, holding both combatants firmly to their work. There was no shirking the battle. It had to be fought out.

"Ready?" cried Hal, putting himself on guard.

Jerry's eyes rolled about the room, as if he still hoped for a loophole of escape. But a sharp tap on the nose brought him to his senses.

With an angry growl he put up his fists.

"Ready?" asked Hal again.

"Yes."

"Then guard yourself."

There was a quick play of fists and arms. The chain was so short that it was impossible to avoid a blow except by pure science. And in this Hal was the better man.

In an instant one hard blow fell on Jerry's temple, and another on his chin. A quick feint and then his nose got it, and "the claret" spurted freely.

Hal's face had been hardly scraped.

Another moment and Jerry's right eye was put in mourning, by a tap that would have dropped him from his feet, only for the chain.

The young villain was getting severely punished. He jerked back, howling with fury, and striving to tear the hook from his collar. But the stuff held on faithfully.

There was but one thing for it. To come to close quarters.

With a growl of fury he rushed in through Hal's guard, heedless of a stinging right-hander, and clasped him with both arms round the waist.

The movement was so quick and unexpected that Hal was taken by surprise, and Jerry got the advantage of the hold.

His stout, squat figure gave him an advantage in a wrestle, and ere Hal could maneuver for the advantage a quick lift and trip took him from his feet, and he was flung heavily on the boy, who screamed as if he had been killed.

Jerry hung on and fell on top. With an alert movement he managed to secure Hal's arms under his knees. A growl of satisfied rage came from his lips.

"It's my turn now," he hissed, as he hurled his fists furiously into the face of his fettered antagonist.

It was a sorry business for Hal, just then. He was in danger of being severely punished. Luckily for him a happy accident came to his aid.

The next blow of Jerry's fist was avoided by a quick motion of the head. The blow went on, and fell on the breast of the boy who lay beneath. A howl of pain followed, and a spiteful kick that, by good luck, took Jerry in the shins.

Jerry gave his leg a hasty jerk upward, and incautiously released Hal's right arm. It was a fatal movement. In an instant Hal had his antagonist by the throat. A quick twist, and he was on top and Jerry under.

Choking him fiercely, he gave him a stinger that closed his eye.

"Enough! Enough!" yelled the discomfited foe. "Let me up! You're killing me!"

"You don't want any more, then?"

"No, no! Enough! Let me up!"

Hal was a chivalrous fighter. Without another blow he sprung to his feet, dragging Jerry with him by the chain. The face of the latter

was puffed out and bloody till it looked like a piece of raw beef. Both eyes were so swollen that they were hardly visible.

Hal removed the chain.

"I think you won't try house-breaking around here again, Jerry Bounce. Not this week, anyhow. There is a basin of water. Go wash your face while I give this youngster his rations."

The boy sprung up and attempted to escape at this threat, but Hal nabbed him with a quick reach, and seating himself on a stool forced him down over his knee.

"We'll see who's the guy now, my lively young sharper! That lock's got to be repaired, you know."

Doubling the chain he held in his left hand, he brought it down with a smart swipe on the rear of the boy's body. Down it came, again and again, a wild howl following every blow, until any passer-by must have thought that murder was going on.

"There. That will do! I don't think you'll set down much for the next week," said Hal, releasing his victim. "The next time you know anybody that wants a lock repaired, just come 'round here."

The boy limped away, rubbing his sore region and muttering revenge.

"This way, now! Get out of here, the pair of you! If you don't slide in short meter, I'll give you some more rations."

He opened the front door and stood threateningly beside it, chain in hand, while his well-whipped antagonists limped out.

Locking the door behind them, Hal went back with a grim laugh of triumph and washed the blood from his face.

He had not come off without some beauty-spots. One eye was in mourning and there was a long red line on his cheek.

As he was admiring himself in the glass there came a loud knocking on the locked door. Hal hastened there. A well-dressed young fellow stood on the step.

"Mr. Lyon wants you at the bank," he announced. "Here is a list of tools he wants you to bring. What is the matter with your face?"

"Been having a little set-to with the gloves," answered Hal. "Got my beauty improved. But if you like fun you just ought to see the other fellow."

CHAPTER IV.

A JOB FOR A LOCKSMITH.

THE establishment of the locksmith looked rather the worse for wear when Hal went back, after his chat with the bank messenger.

On one side of the room was an old-fashioned mantle and fire-place, that stood well out from the wall and was inclosed in front and on the sides with carved woodwork.

It was here the young burglars had been at work. They had pried, with hammer and chisel, the woodwork loose on both sides of the chimney.

They had evidently been in search of something which they supposed to be hidden there.

Hal stood and looked curiously at the devastation. On the side where he had caught them at work the frame had been forced out until it gaped ten inches wide.

He turned his eyes from the scene of burglary to the paper he had captured from Jerry. Faded as the drawing was he could see that it did bear some faint resemblance to the mantle and its surroundings. At one point there was a cross, as if to draw special attention.

"What the jolly roosters does it all mean?" cried Hal, in a quandary. "This diagram looks to be a hundred years old. And the house is that old. Is there something of value concealed here? But how did Jerry Bounce get this paper, and how comes he to be working the job? If it wasn't for this I'd think Pat Lyon had a hiding-place here somewhere for his money, and they'd smelled it out. But they talked about finding a paper. I calculate I'll take a look, anyhow, before I put off with them tools to the bank."

The gaping framework showed a flat wall behind it. But looking down to where the crack was narrower he saw what seemed to be a hollow place behind the frame.

Fired by curiosity, Hal seized the hammer and chisel and began to pry the board loose further down.

"Them chaps have been sent here by somebody," he muttered. "They might send somebody else while I'm gone, and finish their job. If there's anything worth going for, I guess I've got as long a nose for smelling out secrets as the next fellow."

The nails yielded to the prying edge of the chisel, and the crack widened. Looking in again he saw that there was a bowl-shaped hollow of several inches in depth. And at its bottom he saw a folded and discolored paper.

He could not yet reach it with his fingers. But as he did not wish to do further damage to the woodwork, he selected a long-handled pincers from the work-bench, inserted it at the crack, and in an instant had hold of the long-hidden document.

He drew it out in triumph, and looked at it with eyes of curious interest.

"Jerry and the boy said they were to get a hundred dollars apiece for it. It must be worth a pile of cash. What the world can it be?"

The ancient paper crinkled in his hands. It seemed stiff with age.

"I don't know that I've any right to meddle," said Hal. "And maybe I'd learn something that I'd best not know. I've got no time now, anyhow. Pat Lyon will be in a royal bad humor if I fool here much longer. I'll just put this paper where the next party of thieves won't find it, and fix things up a bit before I go."

Hurrying out to the rear room, he hid the mysterious document in some hiding-place which he knew in that apartment. Then returning he seized the hammer, and with a few skillful blows forced the loosened boards back to their place, and drove the nails home again.

"That'll do for now. I fancy the chap that's behind Jerry Bounce is discounted in this game. Now, the next thing on the carpet is to scoot down to the bank."

Selecting the required tools, he hurried to the door. He hesitated here a moment.

"It isn't quite shutting up time yet," he said. "Suppose some customer should come, what would he think? Ah, I have it! I'll settle that. Might as well give them something to satisfy them."

He hurried back into the shop, and returned in a minute with a long strip of black stuff, which he proceeded to tie to the door-knob. A gay laugh broke from his lips as he proceeded with this piece of mischief.

"Shouldn't wonder if it would be all over town before another hour that Pat's kicked the bucket. Won't it be jolly fun if we have the undertaker coming here to measure him for his coffin, and all his old friends shedding tears over his cold corpse? My stars, that's a jolly go! Wonder if the old coon 'll take the strap to me?"

He rubbed his back comically as he hurried along, and broke out into a new peal of laughter as he thought how neatly he had laid out the two young burglars.

"I fancy I'm about square," he meditated. "One job will balance the other, and nothing left over for tally."

Hastening at his fullest speed, to make up for lost time, he soon reached the bank.

It was long after bank hours, and the door was closed, but a rattling knock soon brought the watchman.

"Isn't this the bank where you've got the Old Tom to play with your lock?" asked Hal.

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Pat Lyon's 'prentice. He's sent for me to bring tools."

"That's all right. Come in. He's waiting for you."

In a few minutes Hal was ushered into the business room of the bank. Passing through a door in the rear, the watchman led to a room back, which was lighted up and occupied by several persons.

The rear wall of this apartment was partly taken up by the strong iron door of the bank vault, sunk into a solid framework of wrought-iron and brick backing.

On his knees before this door was Pat Lyon, busily engaged at the lock. Several of the bank officers sat about the room, with anxious faces.

"Ha, Hal! Here at last, are you? What's kept you? And what ails your face? You should have been here fifteen minutes ago," came impatiently from Pat's bearded lips.

"Stopped to play a game of marbles with some of the boys, and got hit with a white alley in the eye," answered Hal, a little riled at this. "Didn't know you was in a hurry."

Some sharp answer was on Pat's lips, but he restrained himself.

"Sharp words won't work with that boy. I might have known that," he muttered. "Got the tools, Hal?"

"Reckon so," and Hal laid down his package.

"How is the job going?"

"It's a confounded hard nut to crack. So far I've only been studying it. I think I've got the hang of the thing at last. But there's one or two mysteries yet that I've got to figure out. Did you fetch the blanks and files?"

"All of them."

"And the hand-vise?"

"Yes."

Pat opened the bundle, and selected a blank key from the dozen or more that Hal had brought. This key he carefully marked with a pointed instrument.

"Set up your vise somewhere around here, and file down this blank to these lines."

While Hal prepared to obey orders Pat took some fine instruments from the package and began again to probe the keyhole.

The bank officers looked on with curious eyes. To them it seemed impossible for mortal man to tell what lay beneath that flat sheet of wrought iron, only pierced by a single narrow opening; but Pat's fingers were like eyes. The fine touches of his delicate probe told him of the conditions of things within almost as if the iron was glass and he could see through it. Here the probe moved freely in a hollow space. There it met an obstruction. There again it touched a spring,

that gave slightly. All this was like a, b, c to Pat's brain. He was, point by point, getting down to the secret of the lock.

"Do you fancy you will ever get through it?" asked the president, doubtfully. "You have been four hours at work now and have done nothing but probe."

"I expect to be four hours more at work and do nothing but probe," answered the sturdy locksmith. "If it's your supper hour I'd advise you to go home, or you'll get but a cold snack. You can do no good here."

This was rather plain talk to a bank president. That important individual grew red in the face, while his eyes flashed.

"What do you mean, sirrah, by that kind of talk? Do you know who I am?"

"I don't care a withered fig-leaf who you are," answered Pat, haughtily. "If you don't like my style of working or talking pay me off and hire somebody else. It's I that's doing this job, not you. And I happen to know what I'm about. If you think I don't you're welcome to try your hand."

"I don't pretend to know anything about locks," muttered the president, still angry.

"Well, I do. You'll get along better by holding your tongue, and tending to business you do know— Got that blank in shape yet, Hal?"

"Ay, ay!" answered Hal, with a sly laugh at the way Pat had squelched the president.

"Bring it here, then."

The important official sat in silence for a minute. He began to speak once or twice, but interrupted himself. Pat seemed to have forgotten that there was any such person in existence. Finally the president sprang hastily up and seized his hat.

"I don't know that we are of any use here, gentlemen," he said. "Mr. Durbin will be enough to stay. He and the watchman can look after the safe if it is opened. We'd better take this good mechanic's advice, and go home to our suppers. I presume we do know more about counting money than picking locks."

The persons who were sitting listlessly around looked up gladly at this suggestion. They had been secretly mourning over their lost suppers. Seizing their hats they followed their chief from the room, leaving the single person who had been selected to mount guard over the treasures of the safe.

Pat looked with grim satisfaction over his shoulder, as the door clanged behind them.

"A mighty good riddance," he growled. "I wonder if he thinks I want any of his money? I'll take what I earn, and want no more. And I'll let no man teach me my business, if he's got gold enough to buy the moon. Hang all conceited popinjays, I say!"

The remaining bank officer smiled, as if he was inclined to agree with the ruffled locksmith.

"Round off this corner, Hal. And file this slot a shade deeper. There's an awkward tumbler at that point that's bothering me."

A few minutes sufficed for this work, and Hal returned the key.

Dropping his tools Pat now inserted the key. He was beginning to see daylight before him in his job.

It needed some further filing before it would enter. Finally, however, he got it well in, and tried to turn it in the lock. It moved slightly and then caught.

Pat put his ear close to the iron and worked the key again. There were slight clicking noises that had the meaning of words to him.

He removed the key, greased it slightly, and inserted it again. After trying it he drew it out and closely examined its surface.

"Ah! I thought so. The file here, Hal. Or let me to the vise. It needs an older hand than yours now."

For the next hour he kept up this process, filing and testing, the key step by step approaching the required shape.

One by one the tumblers of the lock were lifted. The key moved with some freedom. Yet it would not turn. There was some difficulty inside that could not be discovered.

Pat worked industriously for another hour, but in vain. That check, whatever it was, continued in his way.

Finally, rising in a fit of impatience, he flung the key to the floor, and mopped his wet brow with his handkerchief.

"Hang it all, there's a thief of some kind in the way! I can feel the rascal, but he's too sly for me to get hold of him."

Leaving the key where he had flung it, he turned to his probes, and began again to study the mysteries of the lock.

Further filing and trying followed. Another hour passed. At the end of that time Pat rose to his feet, mopped his brow and turned to the bank officer.

"I didn't think there was a lock in America that could fling me, but I'll have to give in to this. There's a catch in it somewhere that goes beyond my science. I fear you'll have to take the sledges to it, and the bank is welcome to the fifty dollars they paid down in advance. I expect to be paid for my successes, but not for my failures— Ha! What's that?"

He sprang around as hastily as if he had been

stung by a hornet. A peculiar click from the lock had caught his ear.

Hal was kneeling before the lock, holding a piece of bent wire which he had inserted into the key-hole. His curiosity had led him to try his hand.

"Hold that as you have it! Don't move it for the world!" cried Pat, excitedly. "Let me have it!"

He carefully grasped the wire, and pushed Hal away with one hand, while he began to work it back and forth with the other.

There came the same clicking sound again. A smile of hope came to Pat's face. He repeated the movement, listening and feeling with all his educated alertness.

Then he sprang to his feet, and flung his cap in the air, with a shout of triumph.

"I've got the thief now, by all that's good! Been working these three hours on the wrong tack, and trying to walk through a blind alley. But if I don't have that iron door open in an hour, I'll give up my trade and turn fisherman."

Carefully selecting another key blank he commenced to file it in quite a different fashion from the other. The same processes were gone through, testing, greasing and refiling. Another hour passed by. But, inch by inch, Pat was getting nearer to his goal. There was no despondency in his face now, but cool expectation.

Hal and the bank officer looked on with a hope drawn from the locksmith's confident manner.

The key was again inserted. It moved some distance in the lock and then caught. Pat pressed it hard. There was a click as if something had suddenly given way. The key turned further. With a clashing sound a bolt seemed to shoot back.

"Good for our side!" cried Hal, in an ebullition of joy. "Hurrah for Pat Lyon! Got it, just as I knew he would. When he goes for a lock, something's got to give."

"Not yet," said Pat, shaking his head. "The job's not done yet."

"Why, the key turned all right."

"I'll let you into the secret," was the reply. "The lock is a double one. It may be opened with one key with a proper knowledge of the combination, but otherwise it takes two. The trouble was I began at the wrong end. Hand me that first key."

"The bank key was a single one," said the officer.

"I know that. Yet it had a double movement. I have made the two movements separate. Have you got it, Hal?"

"Yes. Here it is."

Pat inserted the key handed him, gave it a hard turn, and with a clash the remaining bolts sprang back!

Seizing the safe-handle he gave it a jerk. It came open with an easy movement, revealing the treasures within.

"A glorious job, on my faith!" cried the bank clerk, enthusiastically. "Mr. Lyon, you are a hero!"

"You had better lock up again," answered Pat, coolly. "Take these keys to the president. They're a heavy weight on a man's conscience, with all that money in trust. Come, Hal, I reckon we've earned our suppers."

CHAPTER V.

A MYSTERY AND AN ADVENTURE.

THERE was a stern and lowering look on Pat Lyon's face as he stood in his salesroom the next morning with his eyes fixed on his apprentice who had just then entered.

"Come here!" he sternly commanded.

Hal obeyed without a word, though there was a look of sly meaning on his face.

"Have you forgotten, young man, that you are legally bound to me under the laws of Pennsylvania, and that I have the legal right to teach you your duty by the strap, if I wish to?"

"I judge there's some rot of that kind in the papers," answered Hal, easily. "Put in to fill up, I reckon."

"Off with your coat, you young villain, and I'll put something in to fill up," cried Pat, furiously, as his fingers closed on a leathern strap that lay on the counter. "It's about time I was teaching you your place. I can stand a good deal, but you've gone a step too far this time."

"What is it all about?" asked Hal, coolly, as he seated himself on a chair and looked up at his angry master.

"What is it about? Why, that crape you hung on the door last night. You've made me the laughing-stock of the street, and I'm going to take satisfaction out of your hide."

"People are talking about you everywhere this morning, that's a fact."

"It's all your doings, you insolent rascal. You've gone a little too far, this time."

"Not much! I wish it was my doings. They're talking about the grand job you did last night. Why, it's in all the newspapers, and you can hear it at every corner. You're the hero of the town."

"The hero!" cried Pat, scornfully. "Hang it all, I had an undertaker here before breakfast to see about burying me."

"The major won't let him bury you," answered Hal. "We'll get out an injunction. Why, I heard some folks say there ought to be fireworks, for the honor of the city."

"There were three of my old friends just called to shed tears over the corpse."

"I just heard some folks say that Pat Lyon's the liveliest man in town. So we can match one against the other."

Pat hesitated, bit his lip, and then flung the strap under the counter, as he burst into a loud laugh.

"Confound it all, the sly rascal takes all the discipline out of me. Go bring that crape in off the door, and thank your stars I didn't scorch you soundly."

Hal obeyed. He was not a bit troubled about the whipping, for a like scene had occurred in the shop twenty times before. This was not his first trick on his good-natured master.

"The fact is, I couldn't help it," he explained, on his return. "You sent for me to the bank before quitting time. Now it wouldn't do to let folks see the shop closed before six, without some excuse. I just hung out this bit of crape, so nobody could report you had run off."

"You sly rogue. They'll have my epitaph in all the newspapers."

"Epitaphs never tell the truth, so you're all right. They'll be making you out an angel. That and the lock-picking together ought to plant you for the biggest man in Philadelphia."

Pat leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily. Hal had quite taken the starch out of his discipline.

"There was something queer happened here yesterday," remarked Hal. "I have an odd story to tell you. But I'd like you first to tell me something about this house. It's a very old place, and I'm told that it has been in your family for many years. There's generally some mystery about these old mansions."

Pat turned upon him sharply.

"What are you driving at? What's this about mysteries?"

"That's what I want to know. I wish you would tell me the mystery of this house."

"There's not a ghost in it. Nobody was ever murdered inside its walls. What put such nonsense in your head? Nobody ever breathed a word against the house."

"You're keeping back something," declared Hal, positively. "Is there no story of secret hiding-places and concealed papers? Is there no lost deed, or will, or other document, that's worth a heap of money?"

There was a look of excitement on Pat's face as he turned hastily toward his apprentice.

"Hal!" he cried, eagerly. "Have you found anything? There's an old story. I am not at liberty to make it public. But tell me what has happened! Then I may tell you a thing or two."

Hal had taken from his pocket the paper with the diagram. Pat gazed curiously upon it as the prentice unfolded it before his eyes.

"That is very strange," he remarked, with repressed excitement. "I have seen that paper before. But not since I was a mere child. How came you by it? I don't understand this."

At this moment they were interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of the haughty-faced bank officer who had visited the locksmith the day before.

His eyes were fixed on the pair, and they fell with a sharp glance on the paper which Hal held. A look of strange meaning passed over his face.

"Wait," said the locksmith. "We will talk this over after awhile."

He turned to the customer, while Hal replaced the paper in his pocket.

"You did a remarkable fine piece of work last night," said the officer, graciously. "I must congratulate you on your success. It is the talk of the town this morning."

As he spoke his eyes were covertly fixed on the apprentice. A faint look of satisfaction passed over his face as he saw the latter return the mysterious diagram to his pocket.

"I told you I would go through it," answered Pat, proudly. "I never saw the lock yet I couldn't pick if you gave me the time."

"I don't doubt you, after last night's exploit. You have well earned your money. Young man, will you just step to the door and ask my coachman to come in?"

Hal obeyed. In a minute more the coachman entered the room.

A whispered conversation took place in a corner of the room. Then the coachman retired, but reappeared after a minute with a canvas bag, which he handed to his master, after which he again left the room.

Hal's eyes were fixed on them curiously. It seemed to him as if there was a good deal of fuss about a small matter. But he turned away with a look of disgust.

"Only some more of his airs, I judge," he muttered.

Yet he fancied that the gentleman showed a curious interest in the character of the room, by the glances he cast round him as he took the seat which the locksmith offered him.

"I have here the hundred which we yet owe you for your last night's work," he remarked.

"I thought you were too high-priced, you remember. Yet I am quite satisfied to pay you this. You have fairly earned it."

"Jobs of that sort don't come every day in a man's business," answered Pat. "We have to nurse that kind of angels."

Hal walked back into the rear workshop and threw off his coat.

"I'll be shot if this isn't the spryest bank man that I ever heard of," he muttered. "He's dreadfully eager to pay his debts. It's enough to give a man some confidence in human nature. But he's got a fearful uneasy pair of eyes. Acts as if he was on the lookout for something."

In a few minutes more Hal was at work, and had driven the whole affair out of his mind. The sound of voices came to his ears from the front room, indicating that the conversation was still going on. But he paid no further attention to it.

He did not notice that, after awhile, the door again opened, and another person entered the store.

A call from the locksmith first brought Hal back to a sense of what was going on.

"What is it?" he answered.

"Put on your coat and come here. I want you."

Washing his hands Hal obeyed.

As he entered the room another person was just leaving. The bank officer was still there, but seemed preparing to depart.

"Here's a job for you," said Pat. "Go to this street and number, and see what is wrong. Do you know the parties there?"

"No."

"They know you then. You were sent for particularly. Likely some of the many girls you are sweet on live there, and want to see your pretty face. I know that you are a sad rogue among the girls." Pat laughed heartily as he handed the paper to his apprentice. "There. It is something wrong with a wardrobe, I believe. Take your tools and be off."

In a few minutes more Hal was in the street, very willing to get out of the confined air of the shop.

It was a bright autumn morning. The air was fresh and bracing. Hal walked along in his brisk fashion, exchanging greetings with half the people he met, girls and men alike, for he had a host of acquaintances in that part of the city.

The locality to which he was directed, however, lay far down in the Southern quarter. He looked at the written directions again, with curious eyes.

"Sent specially for me, did they? Who can know me down there? I wonder if Pat's hit the mark, and if it's some girl that's smitten with my mustache? Looks more like that than anything else."

He gave a conceited laugh, as he twisted the ends of his rather thin mustache. The rascal was wide awake enough to know that there was something about his trim figure that took with the girls.

A half-hour's brisk walk took him to the locality to which he was directed.

It was a large house, in the extreme southern portion of Seventh street, as then built, though the street now runs two miles further south.

The house stood alone. The square above was built up, but it was the only house on this square and was surrounded by a yard and a high fence. Outside was a broad vacant lot, thickly grown up with weeds.

He shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't know anybody in that shanty, I'll bet on that. Maybe there's somebody there that's heard of Hal, the Prince of the Prentices. I'm open for anything, fun, work or frolic. Here goes."

He gave the bell a sharp pull. The door was answered by an ill-favored and haggard-faced old woman, whose appearance brought a shrug to Hal's shoulders.

"I hope this isn't the young lady that's pining to see my handsome countenance," he said to himself. "Maybe they've found her out, and locked her up in her room, to keep her from running away with her handsome locksmith."

The woman stood holding the door open expectantly.

"I've been sent for to do a job of locksmithing here," announced Hal.

"Oh, yes," answered the old woman, in a cracked voice. "I've been waiting for you. Walk in. We've got a trouble with a wardrobe."

Hal followed her into the house.

"It isn't a sell, anyhow, like that business yesterday," he muttered. "But mercy! is this the sweet young damsel of my dreams?"

He kept an eye around him as he followed the old woman, in hope of seeing a more attractive face. But the house seemed to have no other tenants, so far as he could see.

It was a large, substantially-built house, though somewhat sparsely furnished. The halls and stairs were uncarpeted, and the walls plainly whitewashed. The room to which his guide at length ushered him, on the third floor, contained but a few very plain articles of furniture.

But nothing in this surprised the worthy

'prentice. Carpets and wall-paper were not the common things then they are to-day, and there was nothing unusual in bare floors and walls.

"Here's what we want done," remarked the old woman, pointing to a large, plain, closet-shaped wardrobe. "There's something the matter with the lock. The key won't turn in it. I will leave you to fix it."

"All right," answered Hal, cheerily. "I will soon see what's the matter. I may have to take it back to the shop to repair it."

"Very well."

His guide left the room, and closed the door carefully behind her.

"So this is my adventure," laughed Hal to himself. "An old hag, a half-empty house, and a broken lock. And after all the confounded nonsense that's been running through my head. I believe I've been letting my fancy play the fool with me."

He opened the wardrobe door and looked at the lock.

"It's ridiculously dark here. What have they got those shutters pulled to in that way for? I want more light than this."

He walked to the one window of the room, flung up the sash, and then stepped back in surprise and dismay.

For across the stout window-frame before his astonished eyes there ran a series of strong iron bars, too close together for any human body to pass between them.

Strange thoughts passed through his mind as he stood looking at them.

What did this mean? Had this room been used as a prison? He knew not what to make of it.

The shutters were bowed so that they were but three or four inches apart. He gave them a push open, but they resisted. They seemed to be firmly fastened on the outside.

"There's something mighty odd about this," he muttered. "I don't suppose it's any of my business, though, if they like their windows in this style. I'll finish my job and get out of these queer quarters."

He returned to the wardrobe. Inserting a master key in the lock, he turned it. The bolt shot out with a free click.

"There's nothing the matter with that lock," he cried, as he snapped it in and out with the key. "What ails the blazing idiots, anyhow? This is another sort of fool's errand. What's become of the old hag? I must hunt her up and give her a yard of my opinion."

He walked angrily to the door, turned the knob of the latch, and gave it a hard pull.

To his utter surprise it refused to yield. The door was fast! He was a prisoner in that room!

The thought that the window-bars had any application to him had not for a moment entered Hal's brain. What could any one want to take him prisoner for? The idea was preposterous. He fell back a step and gazed at the door with a look more of amusement than of dread.

"Got my adventure, after all," he muttered. "This is rather rich. But I hope the fools don't think they can hold Hal Prince, the locksmith's 'prentice, with a common lock like that, and him with his kit of tools?"

Laughing grimly at the thought, he selected some instruments from his pocket, inserted them at the key-hole, and after a few minutes' manipulation succeeded in unlocking the door.

"Open Sesame," he laughed, pushing at the knob. "That little game was played on the wrong duck."

But to his dismay the door still held fast. It was evidently bolted as well as locked. Hal was a prisoner in spite of his tools.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE EMPTY HOUSE.

AN hour had passed. Hal was still a prisoner in the room into which he had been entrapped. He was walking furiously up and down the floor, trying to imagine what it all meant.

"What in the blazes do they want with me, anyhow?" he ejaculated. "I am not a millionaire, with a pocket full of diamonds. I don't know any dangerous secrets. I wouldn't even make good pork if they want to cut me up and sell me to the butchers. I can't see what's in the wind."

He stopped quickly in his walk as a slight sound behind him met his ears. Turning sharply round he saw on the floor by the door a waiter well covered with articles of food.

How it had been got into the room in that quiet fashion he could not imagine.

On the top of all lay a folded paper, which he hastened to open and read. There were on it a few lines of writing, as follows:

"Do not get uneasy. No harm is intended you. For purposes of our own we may keep you here for two or three days, but you will be well treated. Eat your dinner and keep your temper."

That was all. There was no signature to the precious document. Hal read it again, with a face inflamed with anger, and then flung it furiously to the floor.

"A confounded cool set of idiots, these chaps are! I wonder if they think I'm going to stay here? Two or three days, eh? We'll see about that. I don't want to break up this housekeeping, but I'm going through that door."

He looked around him for some weapon with which to break through the panels of the door. In doing so his eyes again fell on the platter of food. It looked inviting, and his excitement had made him hungry.

"Well," he declared, "that's not a bad idea. They know the shape of a square meal, anyhow. I guess I'll go for that provender."

There was a broiled steak, done to a turn, bread and butter, and a cup of steaming coffee.

Hal seated himself at the table on which he had arranged this lunch, and ate away with great satisfaction.

"I don't think quite as bad of them as I did," he muttered. "That's a prime cut of steak. There's an odd taste about the coffee, though. It's kind of salty. But beggars and prisoners can't be choosers."

Finishing his meal, he rose and walked about the room, trying to throw off a drowsy sensation which had suddenly come over him.

But it was not to be thrown off. His head grew more and more heavy. At last he flung himself on the bed with a loud yawn.

"I'll have to take a snooze to get over this. I wonder if there was anything in that rascally coffee?"

But he was too sleepy to trouble himself about any such matter, and had hardly touched the bed before he was off in a slumber as deep as death.

If he had been drugged, it had taken effect quickly and surely.

Time flies swiftly in sleep. When Hal again opened his eyes for all he knew it might have been five minutes or five days since he had closed them. A ray of sunlight made its way through the opening in the window-shutters, showing that it was now afternoon.

He rose from the bed and walked about the room with a heavy head and staggering step.

"I don't know what's the matter with me," he muttered. "Something queer in my head. I know my brain is all full of spider-webs."

There was a pitcher and basin at one side of the room. Pouring out some water he gave his face a good soaking, and poured the refreshing liquid on his head until he began to recover some of his old wide-awake feeling.

Memory now came back to him.

He looked around the room. The dishes and remnants of his meal had disappeared. Door and window were still tightly closed.

"I believe I've been asleep," he absently muttered. "Well, I suppose I may as well sleep it out, as long as they want me here for two or three days."

He rose again, and strolled vacantly toward the door, trying the latch in a careless manner.

To his utter astonishment it opened to his touch. The door was no longer fast.

Hal started back with a whistle of surprise. Then he hurried forward into the outer hall, with a sudden fear that the door might be again closed and bolted on him.

What to make of all this he could not imagine. He had been trapped and prisoned, and had been warned that he was to be kept in bondage for several days. Then, after a few hours' sleep, he had wakened to find his prison door open, and the way to liberty free.

It was a strange business, and he shook his head in hopeless doubt.

"I can't see what it's all about," he declared. "I wonder if they're lying in ambush somewhere, to give me a settler? I don't care a fig if they are. I'm going to investigate this shanty. And if I come across that old hag I'll make her own up, or somebody'll be hurt."

Returning into the room in which he had been held prisoner, Hal overturned the table, and wrenched out one of its legs. He was bound to have a weapon to defend himself if necessary.

Armed with this bludgeon he commenced an investigation of the mysterious mansion.

He went from room to room, with cautious steps, and with his weapon always ready. It would not have been an easy task for any one that had attacked the stalwart 'prentice just then.

But not a trace of a living being did he encounter. Every part of the house was searched, from the upper floor to the cellar. But it was utterly empty. The old woman who had admitted him had vanished, and no other living being was to be found.

The house was very sparsely furnished, and did not look as if it had been lately inhabited. On the lower floor, windows and doors were tightly closed.

Hal leaned on his bludgeon and reflected. The whole affair was growing more mysterious.

"There has been a trap set for me, that's sure," he remarked. "But for the life of me I can't see through it. It's a game without any stake. There's nothing about the house that anybody can get a cue from."

He was standing in the room that answered for the parlor of the mansion. It was dark, with the exception of the dim light from the hall. Its furniture consisted of a center-table and two or three chairs. There was nothing besides to be seen, except a small book that lay on the mantle.

Not willing to leave any clew behind him,

Hal picked up this book and examined it. It was a small copy of the New Testament, which seemed to have been well used.

"I wouldn't have thought they were such pious folks round here," he said, with a laugh, as he snapped the leaves of the book between his fingers.

Something fell from between them to the floor. It seemed an oblong sheet of card-board, of about five inches by three in dimensions.

He picked it up, with aroused curiosity. Here might be the clew for which he was looking.

A glance showed him that it was a picture, a pencil sketch of a young girl's face.

A second glance, and his carelessness became the deepest attention. He had recognized the face. It was that of the portrait which had so attracted his attention on the previous day, in the waiting-room of the Fourth-street house.

There was the same charming curve of cheek and lip, the same shape of eye and nose, the same droop of the abundant hair, the same expression of mingled pride and gentleness.

That had been an elaborate painting in oil. This was but a sketch in black and white. Yet the likeness was as distinct in this as in the other, and Hal stood over it spell-bound, his mind divided between admiration and wonder.

"Talk about queer things, this is more than queer," he muttered. "Here's twice in two days I've come across this woman's picture. Yesterday in that high-toned Fourth-street mansion, and to-day in this Seventh-street barracks, or prison, or whatever it sets itself up for. Who is she, and where is she? It seems to me as if I'm getting curiously mixed up with that woman. I'm not done with it yet. She's somehow going to take part in my life. And if there's any woman in the world I could fall in love with easily, it's just her."

He took another long and loving look at the picture, pressed it to his lips, and then replaced it in the book.

"Calculate I'll freeze onto that," he remarked, as he thrust the prize into his pocket.

Suddenly Hal sprung up, with an exclamation that was almost an oath. He thrust his other hand into his pocket, and began a hasty examination of all the pockets of his clothes.

"By the Seven Sleepers! if this isn't rich!" he ejaculated. "Talk about fools and jackasses. If anybody wants to be kicked for a stupid donkey, it's me, just about now. So *that's* the mystery, is it? *That's* what they tricked me here for, locked me up and drugged me! It was that diagram they wanted. And they've got it too! Went through me while I was asleep, and then left the way open for me to make tracks."

He flung himself into a chair, stretched out his legs, and threw his hat on the table with a look of spite.

"So! The cat's out of the bag now. It's getting to be rich, I declare! First Pat Lyon's sent off to pick the bank lock, and I'm sent off on a wild-goose chase, while those two young rascals try to pry open the shop chimney. Then I get hold of the diagram, and they take all this trouble to get it back. There's a mystery about that diagram. What is it?"

He sat lost in reflection. How did the villains, whoever they were, know that it was in his pocket? As he thought there came to him the memory of the bank officer, who had watched him return it to his pocket that morning, and had cast such strange glances around the room.

He remembered also the calling in of the coachman, and the whispered directions to him.

"And it was he took Pat Lyon off yesterday," said Hal to himself. "It begins to look amazing as if that man was mixed up in the business somehow. It's a queer kind of job. Looks like mighty deep water, but I've got a heavy notion to jump in. It will be some fun to work out this game."

He rose and walked to the door.

"I've made a counter-march on them one way," he continued. "I've captured the paper they're after. If they get it back they've got to be up three hours in the morning ahead of Hal Prince. Guess I won't tell Pat about that paper. I'd like to see the thing work itself out. There's some gay fun ahead."

He was now in the hall near the street door. At this moment there came a sound as if some one were inserting a key in the lock. Hal started back until just within the door of the room, and grasped his bludgeon in a tight grip.

The outer door opened and closed, and a light step sounded within the hall.

The Prince stood on guard, with a strongly-beating heart, but a firm hand and resolute lip.

The new-comer, whoever it was, now came opposite the room door.

Hal gazed cautiously out, then, with a laugh, dropped his club, and laid his hand firmly on the shoulder of the stranger.

A scream followed. It was a woman he had captured. It was not the old woman who had formerly tricked him, however, but a trim-limbed, innocent-faced young girl, who was the picture of terror as she looked around at her captor.

"Don't be scared," said Hal. "I am not go-

ing to hurt you. But who are you, and what do you want here?"

"I—I—I don't know," she faltered, trembling with fear. "Are you a ghost—or a—a burglar? Oh, let me go!"

"Not just yet, my young lady. I'm neither a ghost nor a burglar. But I've captured you, and I'm going to hold on till I know what you're after, and what sort of a house this is that I find you in."

"I don't know," she repeated, with less terror, as she caught a glimpse of Hal's handsome and youthful face. "I've never been here before. I know nothing about it. I was sent here to look for a book. They told me the house was empty."

"They did? Who did? So they lied to you?"

"Oh, dear sir! You won't hurt me? I'm only a poor innocent girl, that lives out. Oh, let me go; let me go!"

"Who are they that sent you here?"

"I daresn't tell. I swore I wouldn't tell."

"Where do they live?"

"I can't tell. Indeed I can't, dear sir."

"You swore you wouldn't tell, did you? That's very neat. Did you swear you wouldn't point out?"

"No. I only promised not to speak."

"Then if I let you go will you promise to lead me to the place you came from, and place me where I can see and hear for myself who these strange people are?"

"They'll kill me if I do! You don't know what terrible people they are!"

"I'll kill you if you don't. And I'm a terrible fellow, too, when I get started."

He dragged her into the room, and seized his bludgeon. The poor, scared thing dropped on her knees in utter terror, and held up her hands. "Oh, let me go! I'll do anything, anything!"

"Swear!"

"Yes. I swear! I'll take you to the house. I'll hide you anywhere. Only let me go."

"I ain't going to hurt you, you pretty young fool. Do you think a good-looking young chap like me could do any harm to a neat, trim little beauty like you? Get up now. It's all right. They sent you for a book, eh? And gave you the key?"

"Yes." The girl had risen to her feet, with a less frightened look. "It was on the mantle in this room. I was to get it, and come straight back, without going through the house."

"All right. Here's the book." He produced the book he had found, though he took care to let the picture fall from it into his pocket. "I'll lay it on the mantle. You can take it from there. I don't want to make you tell any lies."

She followed his directions with a grateful look.

"Now I want you to conduct me to the place you came from, and do just as I say."

"I will, sir," she replied. "I do believe you're a gentleman."

A minute more found them in the street. The girl was a good-looking brunette, dressed in a tasteful servant's attire. Hal walked along chatting with her as lightly as if he had known her for a month. They found themselves at length near a house that stood alone, a solid-built stone mansion, some distance outside the city limits. The afternoon had now waned, and the sun was down.

"So that's the place?" said Hal, curiously. "I want you to slip me into some good hiding-place in that house. As long as you can't speak, you must give me a chance to hear and see for myself."

CHAPTER VII.

PLOTTERS AND SPIES.

In a room in the mansion to which Hal had been led by his frightened guide sat two men. It was a square apartment, furnished as an office. Two windows occupied one side. On the adjoining side was a door, opening outward. Opposite the door, high in the wall, was a small window, of two panes, that seemed intended to give light to some interior room.

This window was hinged, and was not quite closed. It stood slightly open, wide enough for the ear, if not for the eye, of Hal Prince, who had been placed in ambush in the inner room by his guide.

Utterly unsuspecting of a spy, the two men continued their conversation. They were seated immediately under the small window, quite out of sight from Hal's position, though every word spoken came to his ears.

"I can hardly believe that," said one.

"Yet it is true," replied the other.

"A million? Come, that won't do."

"The estate is worth every penny of it. Why, the Western lands alone cover nearly a whole county."

"Whew!—And there are only two snags in the way?"

"Two heirs, or maybe only one."

"Who must be got rid of?"

"No, no, that don't follow. We have only to handle those hidden papers. We can take no further steps while they are in existence. Once get them out of the way and we can snap our fingers at law and heirs."

Hal drank all this in with wide-open ears. What did it mean? An estate worth a million

dollars? And a game to discount the legal heirs? The affair was growing interesting. Yet he could not see that it was anything that he was concerned in. The next words opened his eyes.

"Have you the diagram safe?"

"Here it is. And I felt strongly inclined to knock that meddling idiot in the head."

"No, no. That would be useless and dangerous. He can do nothing to hurt us."

"But remember it was he who spoiled all our plans. We had the coast clear and our two agents at work. Only for his meddling interference we would have known the secret of the old mansion by this time. And that may not be the worst. He may have continued the search, and gained the secret himself."

"I feared that. But I am satisfied that he did not."

"On what grounds?"

"I had a talk with the locksmith. I can see that nothing is suspected. They have simply nailed up the wainscot again."

"Then we can breathe freely."

Hal listened to this conversation, in which he was so deeply interested, with the most earnest attention. Why did they not go on and reveal the secret of their mysterious operations? He would have given much to see and know them, but it was dangerous to make the attempt.

"What is your plan now?" asked the first speaker.

"Silence and patience. We have stirred up ugly matter. It must have time to settle again. They are on the alert now. They must be lulled into security."

"I wish I had knocked that rascally 'prentice in the head."

"Why?"

"Because he's too wide awake. It can never be done while he's about. He must be got rid of somehow."

"I agree with you. But the violent way is not my way. Leave it to me. I have a plan."

"The deuce you have!" said the astonished listener to himself. "I am to be got rid of, am I? You have a plan? That's comfortable. Since you've been so kind, won't you be kind enough to go on and tell us what that plan is? I'd be ever so much obliged."

But the invisible speaker did not seem inclined to do anything of the sort. The conversation went on for some minutes without giving any further information of value to the listener.

By this time Hal's curiosity to see the speakers had grown extreme.

With great caution he opened the window wider and thrust his head through the opening. He caught a quick glimpse of two persons seated below him. Their faces were not visible. One of them had a bald spot in the crown of his head. The other had thick, straight black hair. Both were persons of good size, and well dressed in black.

He got but a glimpse of them. Ere he could take a fuller observation he was seized by the coat-tail and drawn back. A frightened whisper met his ear.

"You said you wouldn't look! I'll scream right out if you do it again!"

Hal turned with a quizzical look. It was his new confederate, the captured girl.

"I didn't look. I only squinted. And I couldn't help it."

"If you look again I'll just scream."

"You little ninny," he said, patting her rosy cheek, "you don't suppose I would go back on my word to you? I like you too well for that. But I'm going to listen. That's in the programme.—Hush! What's that?"

The speakers below had broached a new subject.

"It was a stupid blunder to leave the book, with that 'prentice rat in the house. He might have nailed it."

"What if he had? It means something to us, but would mean nothing to him."

"But suppose the picture had been shown around? There is no telling how far a thing may go. I thought it best to send Kate, to make sure of it."

There was a moment's silence. They were evidently looking at the book which the girl had brought them.

Hal turned to his ally with a meaning look.

"Kate? That means you?"

"Yes," she answered, with a blush.

"That's a nice name. I always like everybody called Kate. I judge that's the reason I can't help liking you."

"Oh, hush, you cunning rascal!" she replied, in a laughing whisper.

"I'm coming to see you. You'll let me do that, won't you?"

"I'll have a pan of hot water ready for you," she responded, with a light laugh. "I always like to give the boys a warm welcome."

Their whispered conversation was interrupted at this point by a sudden commotion in the adjoining room.

"By the Lord Harry, the picture's gone! Hang it all, if we ain't played the fool neatly! We left that fellow loose, and he's got it, as sure as shooting."

"I think not. Very likely the girl dropped it. It was loose in the book, you know. She may have handled it carelessly."

"We had better be sure than sorry. I am going back to investigate."

There was a movement as if the speaker had risen from his chair. He could be heard crossing the floor. Hal turned his eyes to the hinged window, which stood partly open as he had left it.

Just as he did so the door of the next room was opened. A draught of air drew through the doorways of the two rooms and the window between, closing the latter with a loud clash.

There was an instant uproar and alarm. Cries of anger could be heard from the next room.

Kate stood terror-stricken. But Hal had his senses all about him.

"Come," he exclaimed. "We must get out of this like chain lightning. There will be a jolly row if they catch us here."

He seized the half-paralyzed girl around the waist and drew her rapidly forward.

It grew dark as they advanced. All the light in the room had come through the window, from the lamp in the adjoining room.

Their first step beyond the portal took them into darkness. Hal pushed on, not knowing where he was going, and dragging the nerveless girl with him.

A slamming of doors could be heard below. Then came hasty steps, as if some one was rapidly running up-stairs.

The fugitives were at the head of these same stairs. A step more and they would have plunged headlong down. The warning from the approaching steps saved Hal from an awkward disaster.

By good-luck the coming person had brought no light. He was trusting to his knowledge of the house, and advancing in the dark.

"Spies and traitors," Hal heard him mutter. "If I find a listener I'll nail his ears to the wall."

Hal drew his trembling companion close against the side of the passage, holding her very firmly, and placing his free hand over her mouth, to prevent any possible outcry.

"Keep still as death," he whispered in her ear.

The next moment the pursuer had reached the head of the stairs. Fortunately for the fugitives he was following the wall of the opposite side. He passed them in the darkness without a suspicion of their presence. He dashed impetuously on, with another threat of vengeance.

"Now's the time," whispered Hal. "The coast's clear. He'll be back in a minute."

Drawing her forward he cautiously descended the stairs, taking care to step lightly. The hall below was reached.

"Which way now? Where's your wits, girl? Nobody is going to eat you?"

"This way." Kate now led forward. A few steps brought them into a side room, with a window opening upon the lawn.

"Out that window?"

"Yes."

He lifted her as if she had been a feather and dropped her out upon the grass. A nimble leap took him after her. Catching her hand he led her forward into some thick bushes to the left.

"All's right now, Kate. They'll find nothing, and think it was only the wind. Don't be so scared. Why, you are trembling worse than a rabbit."

"I'm dreadfully afraid of them," she whispered in reply.

"What makes you afraid?"

"Oh, I don't know! I keep thinking there's something wrong. They're so stern and strange. Why did they make me swear never to speak of anything I might hear in the house?"

She nestled up to Hal, as if she felt that she had in him a strong support.

"It's queer, that's a fact. How came you to be living with them?"

"I was hired to work in the chambers."

"But why did they make you swear that?"

"I heard something that I shouldn't. They were very angry and fierce. They threatened me. They made me swear not to leave the place, or to speak of anything I saw or heard."

"What was it you heard?"

"That I cannot tell. My oath covers that," she firmly replied.

"What are their names then? Who lives here, and how many people?"

"Don't ask me, sir. Please don't. I don't dare say a word. Just think. I swore on the Bible."

"Hang it all, Kate, but you're solid papers! You're not scared at me any more, are you? Do you think me your friend or enemy?"

"I think you my friend. I like you."

"That's comfortable, anyhow. Now see here, girl. I may want to see you some time. Nobody can tell what may turn up. If I should hide in these bushes and whistle, will you come out?"

"I don't want to get into any trouble."

"Don't you be afraid of that. Will you remember this whistle?"

Hal whistled in a peculiar manner.

"Oh, yes. I won't forget that."

"Well, if you hear it any time just slip out, and come up here among the bushes. There's ugly work up, Kate. I fancy you're an honest girl."

"I try to be," she earnestly answered.

"I'm on the square side all day. When you

hear my whistle you may know it's honesty against roguery. Now let's kiss good-by, and I'll be off."

She drew back half offended.

"I don't kiss strange gentlemen, sir."

"Strange gentlemen! I thought we had got ever so well acquainted. Shake hands then, you little puss. The kiss will keep till we meet again."

He grasped her hand warmly, and was off like a shot, leaving Kate a little sorry that she had been so coy about the kiss.

But Hal had no notion of leaving that locality until he had fully located the house in his mind. It did not stand on any of the regular streets, but out in what was then the open country, though now it is the heart of the wide-grown city.

It was a half-mile from the built-up blocks, with a piece of woodland between it and them. He remembered it now. He had seen the place before, in his rambles about the city.

He still kept on the watch, however, in hopes of seeing the two men whose conversation he had overheard.

In this he was disappointed. After ten minutes' waiting he observed an open carriage leave the house, and drive rapidly toward the city, too far off for him to distinguish its occupants.

Hal bit his lip in anger.

"I've got to twig them rascals," he declared. "I want to know their beautiful physiogns. Maybe they're off for the Seventh-street den to look for the picture."

Full of this idea he hastened in the same direction, with the hope of being more successful there.

Ere long he was in the vicinity of the house in which he had been held captive.

He looked heedfully about him. There was no sign of the carriage. The house was tightly closed. No sign of occupancy was visible. He stood looking at it for several minutes. Finally he took a seat on a stone, at some distance down the street, yet so situated that nobody could leave the house unseen by him.

"I can't say that it's any of my business, if we come down to dots," he said to himself. "But they've took me in to it, and I'm going to make them sick of their job, if I can. This coon isn't going to be locked up and robbed, and not kick back."

Ten minutes passed in this solitary vigil. No living being appeared. The affair began to grow monotonous.

To pass the time he took from his pocket the picture he had captured and began to study the face which had proved so attractive to his fancy.

There were no lights near, but there was a new moon in the western sky, that gave him light enough for his task.

What could the villains, whoever they were, want with this picture? he asked himself. The scheme they were working referred to two heirs to a great property. Was this one of the heirs? But if it was, how could the picture help their scheme?

It struck him that there might be some secret about it, some mysterious inscription, something that would serve as a clew to these strange operations.

He reversed it, and closely examined the back of the picture. Then he tried to see if it would split, thinking that the mystery might be hidden within the paper, but it was simply a piece of innocent cardboard, without mark or inscription.

He had become so intent on his work that he had quite forgotten all surroundings. He had lost sight of the house, and was utterly unaware that a stranger had softly approached, and now stood close behind him, looking over his shoulder.

"I don't know what to make of it," said Hal, shaking his head. "But I do know that it's the picture of a very pretty girl."

At that instant a hand slipped down over his shoulder, and the prize was snatched from his grasp.

"I'll take charge of that, if you please."

Hal started up in alarm and anger. But he did not gain his feet. A hard blow, from some heavier weapon than a fist, struck his head. Down he went, like a log.

There he lay, silent and senseless, under the still night. The villains had, so far, won the odds in the game.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE 'PRENTICE'S ADVENTURE.

A MONTH had passed since the date of our last chapter. Hal Prince, whom we left stunned and senseless from the blow dealt him, was all right again, and the same jolly, heedless fellow as ever.

Nothing had occurred during the month to break the even course of his life. The rascals had kept their word. They had not shown their hand in any direction. After recovering the diagram and portrait they had vanished, so far as the alert 'prentice could perceive.

Hal was not easy under this state of affairs. He knew that this was but a temporary truce,

and that they were concocting some new plot to be put into effect when their prey was lulled into security.

He was put on his mettle by the sharp game that had been played on him, and had appointed himself a committee of one to discount their rascally scheme.

Yet what was to be done? He kept a nightly watch on both the suspected houses, yet not a trace of his enemies was to be seen.

He brought out Kate, more than once, by the signal agreed upon, but she had no information for him, except that the two men had not been at the house since the night of the ambush.

Hal was in a quandary. He was feeling his way in the dark. The plotters had vanished, and he found it impossible to strike their trail.

The worthy 'prentice had not failed to acquaint his master with the adventures through which he had passed.

Pat Lyon listened with a show of great interest and surprise. Yet there was a peculiar look upon his face that Hal could not fathom. It was evident that he knew more than he cared to tell.

"It is a strange business all through," he said, reflectively. "I don't know what to make of it."

"You hinted once before that there was a mystery about this house," urged Hal. "You were going to tell me when we were interrupted. Tell me now."

"There is a story of a concealed paper. What that paper is I am not at liberty to tell. If these fellows were after it they are ahead of me. They know more than I do."

Hal looked at him curiously, and made up his mind that he was keeping something back. He felt sure that the worthy locksmith knew more than he chose to tell.

"All right," he said to himself. "I've got that paper, anyhow. And I'll keep it. I can be sly as well as you."

"As for Mr. Judkin being in it, that's all nonsense," continued Pat. "He is one of the cashiers of the Drover's Bank. Men of that stamp don't go into burglary."

"Don't they? I wouldn't trust him the length of a pickled eel. It was him got you out of the way when they wanted to play their trick here. And he was around bright and early the next day to spy out the lay of the land. I've been looking for him, but I can't catch him with his hat off. I bet high he's got a bald spot on the top of his head, like that chap I heard plotting."

"A bald spot don't prove anything," answered Pat. "I'm beginning to get one myself. Come, Hal. Mrs. Smith is waiting to have her bell-pull repaired. We are wasting time in useless talk."

"All right. I'm on hand for the job."

Yet if his talk was checked he made no promise not to think. His brain was busy as he went along the street to his work.

"Pat Lyon's either mighty green or mighty sharp," he said to himself. "And I can't see just which. But I've a notion that he's keeping something back. There's a mystery somewhere about this business, and a mighty deep one. And it's clear that he don't want to take me into the game."

"I bet high he's sent me off now to get me out of the way, so that he can make search for that paper himself. I wonder if he'll find it. I rather calculate not." Hal laughed to himself. "Somehow I've a notion I can play sly as well as he."

As to the contents of this hidden paper, however, Hal knew nothing. He had a sense of honor of his own, and felt that he had no right to pry into other people's secrets. He simply concluded to keep it concealed, and wait to see what would turn up.

It cannot be said that Hal suffered this mystery to wear upon his health, or keep him from his usual pursuits. He was still the Prince of the 'Prentices, and continued their leading spirit in every device for sport or mischief that was afloat.

He did not let his watch upon the two suspicious houses keep him from taking part in all the fun that was going.

One evening, about a month after the events last recorded, Hal and a party of his 'prentice friends were returning to the city from the direction of the Schuylkill.

They had been paying a sly visit to a pear-orchard out in that direction, and were on their way back empty-handed and out of humor.

The watch-dog of the farmer had warned them off in a way that meant business, and had forced them to make tracks without a pear.

"We were too tonguey, that's what's the matter," growled Jack Riley, one of the party.

"That's so," acknowledged Hal. "We're a confounded long-tongued set of ninnies. You and I better go alone, Jack, the next time we want pears."

"Or take Jerry Bounce. He's cute enough to snip a pear from that dog's muzzle."

"I don't want any of your pickpocket cuteness," answered Hal. "I don't see any harm in shinning up a pear tree, and salting down a pocketful; but Jerry's ways don't suit my notions."

"Nor mine either," declared another of the

boys. "I s'pose you know why he got ousted from Brown's."

"For impudence, I heard."

"That's only his own story. I was let into the real thing to-day."

"What was it, Bill? Let it out."

"Tain't best to talk too free. But there was some money mizzled. The firm don't say nothing about who took it. But Jerry got his ticket o' leave right after."

"Shouldn't wonder if it was true," cried Jack. "I've caught him in some dirty tricks myself. Tell you what, boys, I vote we cut him. He'll never be any credit to the jolly 'prentices."

"What do you say, Hal?"

"I'm mum. I don't want to blow. But did any of you see Jerry a month ago?"

"When he fell over the old quarry and got his nose smashed and his eyes blacked? You bet we saw him. Wasn't he a sweet picture, though?"

"Rather," answered Hal, dryly. "It was a nasty fall down that quarry."

The boys looked at him, with a new idea.

"It was just about that time you run against the pump-handle and blacked your eye," exclaimed Bill.

"And got that cut on your cheek."

"See here, boys," cried Jack, in sudden glee. "Don't you begin to see down that quarry?"

There's been a mill between Hal and Jerry, and they're keeping it quiet. Now own up, old chap. You can't deny it."

"Jerry will show you the very stones in the quarry where his face hit," answered Hal dryly. "It was a nasty tumble, that's a fact."

The boys looked at him and burst into a shout of laughter.

"You sly old coon, it was you laid him out," exclaimed Jack, gleefully. "I thought them were queer marks for a tumble. And you've been playing shy with us."

"I don't know anything about Jerry," rejoined Hal, with a straight face. "All I know is that I ran against a pump-handle."

This declaration was received with a new burst of laughter. The lads decidedly smelt a rat, and were not going to let it get back to its hole again.

They were now approaching the city. The place where they stood was on the line of Vine street, though a half-mile beyond the built-up district.

Between them and the city a piece of timber bordered this street, a relic of the old forest.

As they neared this locality a carriage came rapidly up and passed them. It was a closed vehicle, driven by a liveried coachman on the box.

Hal was looking ahead at the time. It was rather dark, but he was keen-sighted enough to make out objects at a considerable distance.

He saw what seemed a half-grown boy, who sprung out into the center of the street, looked toward the coming carriage, and then sprung back, and disappeared in the woods.

The next instant there came a shrill whistle from this locality.

"Did you hear that?" asked Hal, anxiously. "Looks squally. Wonder if the Rovers are laying low for us?"

"They swore they'd pay us out, after that last whipping we gave them."

"You saw the boy? There's some fun ahead. What say you, lads? I vote to go ahead, Rovers or no Rovers."

"We're with you. Nary back-down in this crowd."

By this time the carriage in advance had reached the center of the grove that bordered the street.

Another whistle sounded. Suddenly a group of dark forms sprung from under the shelter of the trees. Two of them leaped for the bridles of the horses, the others clustered round the carriage.

In an instant it was brought to a halt.

Hal and his comrades looked at each other.

"It's no Rovers this time. There's some ugly work ahead."

"Shall we go for them?"

"Well, I should think."

The bold 'prentices started at full speed down the line of the street. The assailants of the carriage seemed to outnumber them, but they cared little for that.

Fortunately most of them were armed with the clubs that they had taken on their pear-hunting expedition.

They were none too soon. The men ahead were too busy to observe them. Two of them had the horses by the head. A third had mounted to the box, and was threatening the frightened coachman.

Several others surrounded the carriage, whose door they had just torn open.

A woman's scream came to the ears of the rescuing party.

"Out with her," cried a bearded ruffian.

"There's no time to lose."

"Muffle your tongue, madam, or we'll muffle it for you."

"Drag her out, if she won't come peaceable."

The ruffian flung himself half into the open door of the carriage. A second scream came from its occupant.

"Choke the fool of a woman. She'll give the alarm. Ha! Who's here? Defend yourselves, comrades!"

"Guess you'd better," cried Hal, grimly, as he gave the speaker a clip with his short club that stretched him on the ground.

"Close up! Lay them out! Hey for the jolly 'prentices!"

In an instant the lads were in the midst of the highwaymen, plying their clubs industriously.

Though they were but boys, they were stout and well grown. And they were old hands at this business. This was by no means their first bit of sport with fist and club.

They had taken the highwaymen by surprise. Ere they could defend themselves three or four of them were laid out by the skillfully wielded clubs of the 'prentices.

"Prentices to the rescue!" came in the ringing tones of Hal, as he dashed at the burly ruffian who was seeking to drag the woman from the carriage.

An agile kick doubled the fellow up. He drew hastily back, his ugly face inflamed with rage. But it was only to get a settler from Hal's club on the poll, that laid him out beside his comrades.

At this moment, seeing that their party were getting the worst of it, the three men that had the horses and coachman in charge flew to take part in the fray.

"Don't be frightened," cried Hal, looking into the carriage, where he saw two women crouching back, one of them with more of haughty anger than of fear upon her face. "You won't be harmed. We'll take care of these rascals."

He started back with a sudden sense of astonishment. Despite the dim light he had recognized the woman before him. It was the face of the portrait of the Fourth street mansion, and of the picture which he had so strangely found and lost!

An exclamation burst from his lips. At that moment the scared horses, released from the hands that held them, dashed wildly forward. Hal was struck by the wheel and flung to the ground.

When he rose again, the carriage, with its vision of beauty, had dashed far onward, and was nearly out of sight in the darkness.

The fray between 'prentices and highwaymen went on. But the felled men had regained their feet, and were beginning to get the best of it. They were driving the boys back, with fierce oaths and threats.

Another loud whistle rose in the air. The boy whom Hal had seen before appeared in the edge of the wood. The keen-eyed 'prentice recognized him at a glance. It was the boy of the burglary.

"Away, comrades! The game's up!" shouted the leader, felling the 'prentice opposite him with a savage blow.

The next moment they had sprung back and vanished in the woods.

The 'prentices were about to plunge in after them, but were recalled by a quick cry from Hal.

"Hold hard!" he yelled. "Let them go! Don't follow, on your lives!"

At this warning cry they recoiled. Hal was right. It was not safe to follow those desperate villains into the woods.

CHAPTER IX.

HAL CALLS ON MISS PERKINS.

THE next day the incident we have just recorded was the talk of the town.

The 'prentices had not failed to spread the story of their valor and the defeat of the highwaymen.

Everybody was full of it. The newspapers all had editorials about the outrageous assault, and calling on the city authorities for some action.

The locality where the affair had taken place was searched from end to end, but, of course, nothing was found. The ruffians had left no track.

The strange part of the whole business was that the parties attacked had vanished as completely as their assailants.

No complaint came from the lady of the carriage or her screaming companion. The coachman was silent. There was no sign of existence from the intended victims of the outrage.

There was nothing but the story of the 'prentices to show that such an affair had taken place and it was not long before people began to doubt their word.

They were dreaming or lying, said the wise authorities. The young rascals ought to be suppressed. They are too full of mischief. This whole story is got up for a sensation.

It was in vain that the 'prentices showed their clubs, marked here and there with blood.

"That's only red paint," was the verdict. The heroes of the fray were indignant.

"What ails that woman, anyhow?" cried one. "Is that all the thanks we're to get for our work? Is she going to keep mum, and let us be set down for liars?"

"Not much she cares. We'd best let them chaps had her. I bet somebody'd heard a squeal from her then."

"See here, boys. Do you know I believe Jerry Bounce was one of that party?"

"Oh, that's all stuff."

"No, it ain't. There was a chap with a false nose on that I gave a clip. He went down, and I saw his nose fly. If it wasn't Jerry, then I don't know him. He scrambled for the woods before I could get another dig."

"Let's go for Jerry then, and make him own up. Tain't like the jolly 'prentices to sit still and let folks plaster this lie over them. I vote we make Jerry blab."

It was agreed on, and the party went in search of their late companion, bound to make him toe the mark and tell the truth, or go through a course of sprouts.

It would be no fun for Jerry Bounce if he should fall into the hands of that indignant group. They were not of the stuff that was likely to be tender with rascals.

Hal Prince formed no part of this group. He was otherwise engaged, and occupied with other thoughts.

He had fully expected that the next day would unfold to him the mystery of the lady of the picture. As the day passed by and no word came from her he grew excited and anxious.

A second day passed. Doubt of the 'prentices' story was rapidly spreading. The victim of the assault had not yet spoken.

Hal grew indignant.

"It's what I call a shabby trick," he declared. "So she's going to let us all be set down for liars? I'm bound to find out who that woman is, or burst."

The more he thought of it, the stranger appeared his knowledge of this mysterious woman. He had first seen her face in a carefully painted portrait in a rich city mansion. Then he had found it as a pencil-sketch in a den of villains. Finally he had caught a moment's glimpse of the actual woman in a carriage attacked by a gang of ruffians.

What could it all mean? Why were the rogues so anxious to recover the portrait sketch? What was the object of this effort at abduction? What meant the story he had overheard of a rich estate, of hidden papers, of heirs to be dealt with?

Hal was in a decided quandary. That day he made a dozen blunders in his work. He was too full of worry for careful work.

"If I were you I'd drop my hammer and go soak my head," said Pat Lyon, sarcastically. "You do nothing but make blunders to-day. And you've spoilt more iron than your day's work is worth."

"I can't get that woman's face out of my head," acknowledged Hal.

"What? The woman of the carriage?"

"Yes."

"Oh, come! That won't go down. Everybody says that's a 'prentices' yarn."

"Everybody's a fool," answered Hal, angrily.

"I ain't going to be made out a liar. I ain't going to rest till I find her, and find out what's at the bottom of all this."

"You'd better stick to your work, and drive the woman out of your head. You're too young to be thinking about women."

"I'm old enough to have some wit, anyhow," said Hal to himself. "You're hiding something, Pat Lyon. You're afraid of something. I'm going to dig into this rascality, and I don't care who it hurts. The chaps that locked me up and robbed me wakened up the wrong coon."

There was one clew to the mysterious woman. This was her portrait in the Fourth street mansion. Hal made up his mind to find out who was the original of that portrait before the day was over.

As soon as the day's work was done, and he had taken his supper, he dressed himself in his best suit, and set out on a journey of exploration. Reaching the desired locality on Fourth street, he boldly pulled the bell of the aristocratic mansion. He was not wanting in assurance, and would not have hesitated to visit a king in his palace on a proper excuse.

The colored servant he had formerly seen appeared.

"I want to see the lady of the house," he announced.

"What name?"

"I don't know her name. But I've got business with her, for all that."

"She don't see strangers. You's a book-agent, I s'pose. Or got somethin' to sell."

"Not much," answered Hal. "S'pose you skoot now, and tell the lady that Mr. Prince wants to see her on business. And you can tell her I haven't got a book to sell, nor a hand-organ to grind."

"You muss send up your card and your business," persisted the dignified servant.

"Got a whole pack of cards at home, but forgot to bring any," replied Hal, with a grin.

"Tell her I sent you up for the ace of spades. That's the best card in the pack. As for my business, it's none of your business. You can tell her that if you want to."

The servant disappeared, after carefully shutting the door in his face. He was afraid to trust this impertinent stranger in a house with so many valuables.

He returned after a few minutes.

"I'm sorry," he said, with a grin of satisfac-

tion. "But Miss Perkins won't see no strangers, 'cept she knows their bizness. That's what she tole me to tell you."

"You look sorry," answered Hal, satirically. "Here, blackbird, take her this. And be spry about it."

Hal wrote something on a slip of paper, and intrusted it to the servant.

More suspicious than ever, the darky again shut him out, and went to seek the lady.

When he returned his manner was more respectful.

"Walk in, sah," he said. "Miss Perkins consents to see you."

"That's remarkably kind in her," answered Hal. "Thought she'd come to it after she'd had time to reflect."

He was shown into the waiting-room of his former visit. After a minute or two the lady whom he had seen on that occasion entered. She was richly dressed in silk, and seemed to weigh down her youthful visitor by sheer weight of grandeur and dignity.

"Yet there was a strangely anxious look upon her face as she fixed her eyes upon the paper which Hal had sent her, and which she yet held."

"Excuse me, sir," she said. "Did you send me this paper?"

"I did," answered Hal, easily.

"Something important about the lady whose portrait hangs in my parlor? That is a strange message. What portrait? Who are you, sir? What does this mean?"

"I'll soon settle who I am," answered Hal, easily. "I'm only a locksmith's 'prentice. I was here once before, about a month ago."

"Oh, yes. I recognize you now. But what is the meaning of this visit?" she haughtily demanded. "What portrait do you refer to? What do you wish to tell me?"

"This portrait," said Hal, walking to the picture which had so attracted his attention on his former visit, laying his finger on it, and looking the lady in the face.

To his surprise she turned pale and trembled.

"What do you mean, sir?" she cried, eagerly, all her haughty demeanor disappearing. "That lady? What do you know about her? Explain the meaning of this strange note."

"Does she live here?" asked Hal. "Is she a friend or relation of yours?"

"I will answer no questions until you answer mine," exclaimed Miss Perkins, in an agitated manner. "What can you possibly know about this lady?"

"I saw her night before last."

"You saw her? Impossible!"

"Maybe it is. But I've got pretty fair eyesight. I saw her or her ghost."

"Ridiculous, sir! What do you mean by such a story? Saw her? You have been deceived!"

"I reckon not," answered Hal, confidently.

"You must excuse me, Miss Perkins, but I know just what I'm talking about. I don't want to make any mystery of it. Have you seen in the papers an account of a lady being attacked in her carriage by a party of highwaymen, and being rescued by some 'prentices?"

"Yes," she replied, sinking into a chair, her face still paler. "But they say now it is not true; that it was a story got up by the apprentices."

"They say a good deal more than their prayers. As I happened to be one of the party I can tell you it's as true as Gospel. I upset the leader of the gang myself, just as he was snatching for the lady. And I saw her as plain as I see you this minute."

"And you say—" she began.

"I say it's the woman whose portrait you have here," he firmly replied. "I saw this picture a month ago. And I fell in love with it too much to forget it in a hurry. It's the lady of the carriage, for solid certain."

This declaration seemed to affect Miss Perkins very strangely. She threw up her hands with a peculiar gesture. Her manner grew greatly agitated.

"Great Heaven, what has brought her here?" she exclaimed. "How has she dared? After all the warnings! After the— But you must be mistaken! You are mistaken! That lady is not within five hundred miles of here!"

"Isn't she? Don't you bet on that, or you'll lose your money."

"But what can she mean? The danger! Her silence! She dares to come here! And they are on her track already!"

"That's about all I've got to say," remarked Hal. "I've kept my word, Miss Perkins. Now will you keep yours? What is the lady's name? Where is she to be found?"

Miss Perkins looked at him with growing distrust.

"Why should I tell you that? What is your object in asking?"

"It isn't a bad one," he replied. "From what you say this lady is hemmed in with rascals, and is running blindly into danger. Now I'm her friend, from the word go. I'm fighting for her, tooth and fin. But I must know who she is, and what the danger is, or I'll be working all in the dark."

Miss Perkins eyed him shrewdly.

"You have an honest face," she replied. "But I do not know you. How do I know but you are an emissary sent to discover from me this lady's place of retreat? I will tell you nothing. It is too important a matter to trust to chance."

"I can prove my honesty," declared Hal.

"Very well, sir. At present I have nothing more to say. I will say this, however. You may think you saw this lady. You are mistaken. It was only a similar face. I was foolish to let you alarm me."

"Then it is dangerous for her to come here?"

"Excuse me, sir. I do not think our interview need be extended."

Hal looked in a vexed manner at her haughty face. He bit his lips angrily. Then a look of resolution came to his countenance.

"I will find her out in spite of you," he spitefully exclaimed. "And I'll prove to you yet that I'm her friend, not her enemy. Good-night, Miss Perkins. If you have any more work for me, I can be found at Pat Lyon's, the locksmith."

Setting his hat fiercely on his head, Hal walked out. Miss Perkins looked after him, but made no effort to recall him.

But he was not fairly out of hearing before she clasped her hands, and the former look of dismay and agitation came back to her face.

"Good Heaven!" she cried. "Can it be? Can it be? She here? Then all is in danger indeed!"

Hal meanwhile was making his way home, considerably nettled by the result of his enterprise.

"I bet I find it out in spite of all the Miss Perkinses in Philadelphia," he declared. "We'll see what's what."

He went home and went to bed. He was too full of his thoughts to seek his usual party of companions.

It cannot be said, however, that Hal's sleep was disturbed by his thoughts. He was too young and healthy not to sleep soundly.

Yet he awakened at an earlier hour than usual the next morning, got up and went to the window.

Some early hands were passing on their way to their work.

"Have you heard the report?" asked one.

"No. What is it?"

"I'm told the Drover's Bank was robbed last night. The door was found open this morning. A policeman I met just told me."

"The mischief! Have they caught the thieves? Do they know who did it?"

"No. But the officers say it looks bad for Pat Lyon. He is the only man who knows how to open that vault."

The speakers passed on, but they had left serious news behind. Hal drew back, indignant. Yet he scented trouble in the air. Who could tell what would come of this?

CHAPTER X.

THE ARREST.

WHAT Hal had heard by chance in that early morning hour was confirmed by the later news. The Drover's Bank had been entered in the night, its vaults opened and robbed, and the thieves vanished without leaving a trace behind.

The amount missing was said to be thirty thousand dollars, besides some valuable papers belonging to Mr. Judkin and other directors and officers.

The bank door had been left ajar by the thieves. It had been noticed by a watchman on his rounds, who had given the alarm. But he was too late. The thieves had made their escape.

Pat Lyon's face wore a long and serious look when met by his apprentice the next morning.

"Have you heard?" asked Hal, warningly.

"Do you know the talk that is afloat?"

"About the bank robbery? Yes."

"I don't mean that. I mean the suspicion that's afoot?"

"I wish I had not touched that lock. I fear they'll suspect me."

"They do already."

"How's that?" cried Pat, hastily. "Already? What have you heard? What do they say?"

"That Pat Lyon's the only man who knew the way to open that lock."

"Hang it, boy, this looks ugly. I feared so when I first heard of this. But they can prove nothing. I know no more about the business than the man in the moon."

Hal looked at him with a serious expression.

"I know that," he said. "But it may be worked up into an ugly job. What everybody says may be taken for evidence. See here, Mr. Lyon, don't you think I know enough to run this shop?"

"I don't think you're quite a fool, Hal."

"Then you'd best go visit your uncle in the country. Let this thing blow over a bit, and give people time to think. By that time they'll nab the real thief, and the thing will clear itself."

Pat listened intently, and seemed to be in

deep thought for a minute. Then he broke out, indignantly:

"Run away, you mean? Cut stick, as if I was a real thief? What kind of a man do you take me for?"

"A sensible man, I judge."

"It's a pity then but you had more sense. Don't you see that's just the way to bring suspicion on me? They'll swear then that I'm the bank robber, for sure. And do you fancy that they wouldn't hunt the country through for me? Thirty thousand dollars is too big a pile to let go by the board. You mean well, Hal, but your wit's young. No, no, lad, I'll stand my ground, and face the music."

"That's what I call a sensible speech," exclaimed a man, who had entered in time to hear these last words. "Never run while you can stand to fight. That's my motto."

The speaker was a stout, broad-shouldered person, with a stern and resolute face, and sharp, black eyes.

"Who are you?" asked Pat, sharply.

"I have a paper in which you are interested," answered the stranger, coolly. "I am obliged to you for concluding to face the music. It may save both of us some awkward trouble."

"A paper?" demanded Pat.

"A warrant of arrest," answered the stranger. "You are accused of robbing the Drover's Bank. An ugly charge, my good sir. I will trouble you to step up to Alderman Jones's office."

"It is false!" cried Pat, indignantly. "I have borne an honest name all my life, and I will make these fellows sweat if they dare to arrest me!"

"Oh, of course," answered the constable, dryly, producing his warrant. "Everybody's honest till he's found out. It is astonishing how many honest folks we come across in our business."

"I can prove my honesty."

"Don't I know that? They can all prove it. But for all that some of those fools of judges send them to prison. Come ahead, my honest friend; there's no use wasting your record on me. It isn't me that's to settle it."

"Have you been sent here to insult me?" cried Pat, sternly. "You are impertinent, sir. I refuse to go with you."

"That's the talk," cried Hal, in glee. He was boiling over at the insolence of the constable. "Say the word, Mr. Lyon, and this jack-pudding will go out faster than he came in. Give me the hint and I'll whistle up a dozen of the boys, and duck him in the horsepond."

"Hullo, young spitfire, who are you?" exclaimed the burly constable, turning on Hal, with an amused look. "S'pose you often do that sort of thing, hey? Go ahead, whistle them up. I'd like to have a bit of fun."

"There's enough of this," rejoined Pat, with dignity, as he put on his coat and hat. "Keep quiet, Hal. There's no use kicking against the law. One in trouble in one establishment is enough."

"Let the young blood have his fling," answered the constable, with a satirical laugh. "It's all grist that comes to our mill, you know. Alderman Jones don't mind what sort I fetch him."

"Take jolly good care I and the boys don't catch you napping yet," growled Hal, to himself.

"There, lead on," said Pat, having completed his preparations. "The bank has its inning now. Mine will come next. I leave you in charge of the shop, Hal, till I return."

"I'll run it like a book," answered the confident apprentice. "You can bet high on that. And if you find any constables laying round loose, just send some down this way. I'd like to take the starch out of a few of that sort."

"That's right, my lad," said the constable, approvingly. "You're being brung up in the way you should go. Got your warrant in blank down at the office. I can see you'll be one of my lambs before long."

Hal turned away nonplused. The constable was one too many for him. He seemed to be licking his lips over him, like a dog over a choice bone.

"I'll be back soon," said Pat, confidently.

"They have not a shadow of proof against me."

"And then you'll go for them and sweat them?" queried Hal.

"I rather fancy so."

"That's prime. I hope you'll switch that set-up old Judkin. Somehow I feel it in my bones he's at the bottom of this business."

"What business?" asked the constable, sharply.

"Guess—like I did. Then you'll know as much as I know."

Content that he had got the last word in on the constable, Hal turned back into the shop, leaving the officer with the prisoner to pursue their way to the alderman's office.

But a throng of curious boys had gathered on the street opposite the locksmith's shop during this colloquy. They seemed to know what was up, and some jeering cries followed the prisoner.

Here was an opportunity for the 'prentice to let off some of the spleen that was boiling in his

young veins. He glanced across and saw that the ringleader of the mischievous young rascals was the boy Toby, the sly little villain whom he had once already given a warning.

In an instant he was among the street rats, and had piled a half-dozen of them into a heap on the pavement.

Toby started to run, but the alert 'prentice was too quick for him.

"You'll rob shops, will you? You'll play lookout for highwaymen, will you? You'll yell after prisoners, will you?" With a kick and a box on the ears at each question. "I'll teach you a lesson in honesty, you devil's imp. Now slide, you reprobate, and take these young jokers with you. And tell Jerry Bounce there's a good opening if he wants to howl round Pat Lyon's shop again."

The boys waited for no further advice, but made tracks, with howls and threats, Toby in the lead. He had enough of Hal's way of settling accounts.

The nimble 'prentice strode slowly back across the street, a good deal easier in his mind. He had let off some of the superfluous steam.

Entering the establishment, he looked around him with the sense of a proprietor.

"I suppose most of the boys would go in for a gay time now," he said. "Play boss, and all that. Lay around loose and call for ice-cream and lemonade. But that ain't my style. My loafing time is while the boss is around. I'm here on honor now, and I guess I can toe the mark on that line, along with the next fellow."

In a few minutes he had off his coat and hat, his sleeves rolled up, and was busy at work filing and chiseling. If a dozen locksmiths had been around, Hal could not have worked more industriously than he did without an eye to watch him. Duty with him was stronger than inclination.

Yet he was not easy in mind. No word had yet come from the locksmith. What had been the result of the hearing before the alderman?

The house adjoining the locksmith's shop was occupied by Pat Lyon, with his sister as house-keeper, and Hal as boarder. A brawny-armed kitchen-girl made up the family.

Miss Lyon had been early told of the difficulty into which her brother had fallen. Hal, growing more and more uneasy in his mind, at length entered the house to inquire if she had received any news.

"Not a word," she exclaimed, anxiously.

"Not a word has come. Had you not better go to the alderman's office, and find out what has happened? I don't like this silence. I will look to the store while you are gone."

That was Hal's own idea, and he hastened to put it into practice.

Entering the alderman's office he found that worthy, a stout, red-faced, sturdy individual, in close conversation with his constable. No other persons were present.

"I have called to inquire about Mr. Lyon," remarked Hal, as calmly as possible. "As he has not come home his family are uneasy, and want to know the result of the hearing."

"Lyon, eh? Patrick Lyon?" demanded the official, affecting to consult his book. "Yes. Here's the entry. Charged with bank burglary. Witnesses for bank, Judkin, Wilson and Jenks. Evidence. Prisoner made key and opened vault a month ago. Defense: none. Only a ridiculous story about honesty and good record. Stale. Dead stale. Committed. Ten thousand bail. Not forthcoming. Sent down."

Hal listened to this legal jargon, from which he managed to extract some meaning.

"Sent to prison?" he cried, indignantly. "You have given him no chance to produce witnesses. He could prove an alibi. He was in the house all night!"

"How do you know that? Did you sleep with him?"

"No."

"Did anybody sleep with him?"

"No."

"Did you have a private guard on his room?"

"Certainly not."

"Then your alibi falls through, young gentleman."

"But where's the money if he took it?"

"That we'll very soon know. Officers have gone now to search the house."

"It's an outrage!" cried Hal, indignantly. "He has been rushed through and sent to prison without giving him the ghost of a chance. This hearing has been managed in the interest of the bank, sir."

"Look out, alderman," remarked the satirical constable. "This is the young sport who eats constables for lunch. He might take a notion to lunch on an alderman."

"I'll commit him if I hear any more of this talk," rejoined the official, with a stern look.

There was a harsh and hasty answer on Hal's tongue. But a return of sense made him restrain himself. Alderman Jones might take a fancy to send him to prison after his master, which would not prove quite comfortable.

And the safety of Pat Lyon might need that his 'prentice should remain free.

He remembered also what the alderman had said, that officers had been sent to search the house. There were none but women there. They

might be scared out of their wits. Hal felt that it was his duty to keep an eye on those minions of the law.

Returned on his heel.

"That will do," he said to the alderman. "Much obliged. You've got the boot on Pat Lyon's foot just now. We'll see if we don't get it on them bank officers' feet before we're through."

With this last shot he left the office of the magistrate and made the best of his way home.

On arriving there he found that it was as he had heard. Two or three officers were making search of the house. Miss Lyon and the servant were under charge of one of them, and were half-distracted. The others were searching some of the upper rooms.

"Stop where you are, young man," cried the officer in charge of the women. "I'll keep an eye on you if you please."

"You will, eh? And who's to keep an eye on those coons up-stairs?"

"The law," answered the guard. "They are under the eye of the law."

"It isn't always a very sharp eye," answered Hal. "Guess I'll help it out. Don't you be scared, Miss Lyon. I'll look after them."

"Come back here!" commanded the officer, as Hal made for the door.

"Not much," he answered, springing through and hurrying to the stairs.

A shrill whistle from the officer followed him up-stairs.

One of the men above hastened out into the hall at this alarm.

"Don't get frightened," said Hal, easily. "I'm boss of this shanty just now, and I'm responsible for valuables. Calculate it's my duty to keep an eye on you."

To this no objection was made, and Hal accompanied the officers on their round of inspection.

The search was a thorough, but a decidedly fruitless one. The house was searched from garret to cellar, every possible hiding-place being investigated. The shop was subjected to a like process, Hal aiding them to find secret places.

A quiet smile rested on his lip as the inquiry proceeded. In spite of the possible doubt and suspicion that might attach to Pat Lyon, his apprentice felt none of it. He had the most thorough confidence in the honesty of his employer.

"Guess that's all," said Hal. "Except you look if there's any fresh dug-up places in the yard. I know Pat Lyon like a breeze. But I don't want you to go away till you're satisfied."

"That's right, young man. The thing seems all square. However, we'll take your advice. It's for your master's good as well as ours that we can return a complete report."

The yard of the house was some fifty feet deep. It was partly grass grown, partly made into a flower-bed. They looked around them carefully, and thrust their canes into every disturbed spot in the beds.

"It looks there as if there had been a sod dug up and replaced again," said one of the officers, pointing to a high spot in the grass.

"We'll soon see," replied Hal, seizing the grass with both hands and lifting.

To his utter surprise a square sod came up in his hand. And to his equal surprise the gleam of white paper showed below.

The officer sprung hastily forward, and pulled a bundle of folded papers from the cavity.

"Things begin to look blue for your honest friend, Mr. Patrick Lyon," he said, with biting satire, as Hal fell back in consternation.

CHAPTER XI.

BACK TO THE SEVENTH STREET DEN.

Two days passed slowly away. The locksmith was still in prison, with no immediate prospect of his getting out. The bail had been placed quite beyond his ability, or the good will of his friends, and he was not likely to get out of limbo until the session of the court.

In fact, the papers found buried in his yard made the affair look doubtful, and no one was ready to take the risk of going his bail.

These papers proved on examination to belong partly to Mr. Judkin, partly to the president of the bank, and formed part of the securities they had deposited in the vault.

But where were the remaining papers and the stolen money? The house was again searched, more closely than before. And this search was extended to the houses of some intimate friends and relatives of the accused locksmith.

But it was without effect. Nothing further was found.

Hal had taken good care, however, to more carefully conceal the mysterious document which he had hidden in a secret place in his work-room. He concluded to take care of that himself for awhile longer.

And he noticed that the law officers made no effort to loosen the wainscoting around the chimney, and search behind it.

It was evident that they had received no hint of a secret hiding-place there.

"Old Judkin wants that bonanza for himself," declared the shrewd 'prentice. "Don't tell me

he ain't up to that snuff. I ain't quite a fool. He wants Pat Lyon out of his way. That's my notion. I bet high there's going to be some fun round this shop before that case comes up in court."

A grim look came upon his face as these thoughts ran through his mind. He felt sure that some rascally conspiracy was afoot. And he quietly made up his mind that they'd find Hal Prince no baby to play with.

There was one mystery to be explained—that of the buried papers. Hal did not rest quiet over that. A close search found marks on the fence, as if some one had lately climbed over it.

He called this to the attention of the detectives. And where was the knife with which that sod had been dug? It must have left some marks of dirt about it. Yet every knife found in the house was clean.

These were minor matters, yet they might count on the trial. The only chance for Pat Lyon was to prove that he had not concealed those papers, but that they had been hidden in his yard by some enemy.

On the evening of the second day after the arrest of the locksmith, Hal closed the store at the usual hour, hastily swallowed his supper, and emerged on the street. He had an object in view.

He was hailed ere he had made many steps by Jack Riley, one of his 'prentice friends.

"Whereaway, Hal? In a kind of a hurry, ain't you?"

"Something that way. Anything in the wind, Jack?"

"Reckon not."

"Then toddle along with me. I've got a little job on hand, and I guess you'll peg in neat."

"All serene," replied Jack. "Never seen the time I wasn't on hand for sport."

"Chip in, then. I'll let you into the joke as we sail along."

Their route led them far down town. It ended at the Seventh street house, which Hal so well remembered as the place of his imprisonment.

The fact was that he had come to the conclusion that the parties at the bottom of that business were the bank-robbers. They would be likely to hide their spoil until the danger of suspicion and search blew over. And what more likely place than somewhere about this uninhabited mansion, which they kept under lock and key?

Jack was as eager and enthusiastic as Hal, on being apprised of the character of their mission.

The high fence round the house was no impediment to the active youths. They were over it in a jiffy, and in the yard surrounding the mysterious mansion.

"We've got to go quiet now," warned Hal. "There might be somebody round the shanty."

"Do you think you can get in?"

"Reckon so. There's a window on the second floor not three feet above that grape arbor. They just as well might have left us a ladder."

"Or a front door key," laughed Jack.

Night was now fast settling, and it was growing darker every minute.

Waiting until the gloom was deep enough to hide their movements, the agile boys scaled the arbor and reached the window.

But they here found an unexpected difficulty. The window was fast. The sash refused to yield.

Hal looked at his companion.

"That's awkward. What are we going to do now?" he asked.

"This," cried Jack.

Before Hal could hinder he had dashed his fist through a pane of glass, sending the sharp fragments flying in all directions.

"What did you do that for? There may be people in the house."

"Got to take the chance," answered Jack, dryly. "Can't hang here all night, like dried-up grape bunches. Stoop and wait. We'll soon see."

There was nothing else for it now. The daring boys crouched and waited for signs of an alarm.

Yet all continued quiet. Five minutes passed.

"Jolly papers," cried Jack. "Nobody round. Now let's see what's the trouble."

Pulling himself up as high as possible he thrust his arm through the broken pane, and felt carefully around the sash, for the fastening.

He was not long in finding it, in an iron catch that locked the two sashes together. A click showed that it was open. In a moment more the sash was lifted and the way clear.

The adventurous 'prentices hastened to climb into the open window.

"What ails your hand?" cried Hal. "You've cut it. It is covered with blood."

"There ain't no fun in running your hands through window-glass, I'll give in to that," answered the heroic Jack. "But you don't s'pose I mind a cut, do you? I ain't no baby."

"That's so, Jack. But let me wrap it up. We don't want to leave a trail of blood behind us."

Tearing his handkerchief he tightly bound up the ugly cut in Jack's hand, which was bleeding freely.

This job done they made their way into the inner portion of the house.

Striking a match Hal soon lighted a candle which he had brought with him. Though they were satisfied that the house was empty, yet they preceded their mission by a careful investigation of its rooms.

No sign of a living being appeared. Silence and solitude reigned everywhere. No grave could have been more still and lifeless.

Satisfied that they were alone they began their search. It was a thorough one. Every part of the house was examined, every closet, drawer, and crevice, every article of furniture. The floor was heedfully felt for loose boards. The earthen floor of the cellar was carefully searched to see if it had been recently disturbed.

In fact Hal had another idea in his head besides that of finding the stolen money. That he hardly expected. But some clew to the ugly scheme he had partly discovered might be found.

Yet their search proved in vain. Not a trace of anything was found that could serve as a clew.

"Here's where they had me in limbo," said Hal, as he led the way to the scene of his short imprisonment. "It wasn't that lock I mended. I soon settled that. But they've got a pair of outside bolts to the door. And these bars might do for a prison."

"That's so," declared Jack, looking curiously around the place.

"There's the table I broke. The leg is put back again. That shows there's been some of them around here since."

"Why, it isn't bad got up for a prison," averred Jack. "That's a neat washstand and bureau. And nobody need sneeze at that bed. Them's gay covers."

A look of question came into Hal's eyes.

"There wasn't any of this here," he declared.

"There was only an old blanket on the bed. And that bureau's been brought here since. What does it mean?"

"Maybe they're going to take some more boarders," laughed Jack.

"Must be tastier ones than me, then."

"Anyhow, I don't think this shanty is any too safe for a pair of chaps of our size," remarked Jack, shrewdly. "Looks too much as if folks were in the way of coming and going. I vote we slide."

"Not yet. Our job's not through."

"What else is there? We haven't left a rat-hole."

"There's the yard to search. The chap that was so good at hiding papers under Pat Lyon's grass plot may have taken the same notion here. I'm going to take a look round anyhow."

"I'm with you," said Jack.

Opening the door leading to the yard, they extinguished their candle, and made an investigation of the weed-grown space, by the aid of the starlight.

It proved a bootless one. The weeds were so thick and high that it would have been impossible to disturb them without leaving traces. Yet there was not the least sign of disturbance.

"That jig's up," said Hal, with a sign of disappointment.

"Found as much as I expected," rejoined Jack. "These chaps ain't no fools. Let's git."

"No, no. We must leave things as they found them. It won't do to wake suspicions. Let's go the way we came."

"That's sensible."

Entering the house again they closed and bolted the rear door. Then taking a last look, to see that nothing had been disturbed, they proceeded to the place of entrance.

They halted a moment at the window. There was the sound of a coming carriage. Looking heedfully out, Hal saw it drive past the corner of the house.

The next moment there were sounds as if it had suddenly drawn up. Voices came to their ears. There were the hoarse tones of men, followed by the voice of a woman, whose tones seemed those of pleading.

The intruders looked at each other.

"What's up?"

"Give it up."

"Let's slide."

"That's my notion."

They sprung out of the window, got their feet upon the upper board of the arbor, and pulled down the sash. Hal inserted his arm and fastened the catch.

Running hastily down the improvised ladder, he picked up a piece of stone, ran up again, and flung it through the broken pane.

"That will settle for the broken glass," he said. "They'll think some boy has been flinging stones."

While this was being done the noise in the street continued. The men's voices, harsh but subdued, were audible. But the woman's tones had ceased. There was a slight struggling sound.

"There's something wrong out there," whispered Jack.

"I'm going to take a squint," answered Hal.

Hurrying to the corner of the fence he discovered, after some search, a crack through which he could see.

The sounds had meanwhile continued. Gaz-

ing out, he saw a carriage, with a brace of horses, standing in the center of the street. There was a coachman on the box, who seemed holding in the horses tightly.

No one else was visible, except one dark form, which stood on the threshold of the house door. This person turned and waved his hand, then entered and closed the door.

The coachman gave the reins to his uneasy steeds. Away they went down the solitary street. All outside sunk into silence and loneliness once more.

The 'prentices looked at each other again.

"How's that?" asked Hal.

"Rich," answered Jack.

"What's the next move?"

"Lay low and wait."

"That's my idea."

Crouching in the low weeds by the fence they awaited developments.

All continued still. The house walls drowned all sounds within. Yet the waiting lads knew well that a drama was taking place within, and they built on making their appearance in the last act.

Ten minutes passed. Then the sound of a loud and angry voice met their ears.

The window through which they had escaped was thrown up, and a head thrust out.

"This is blazing queer," came the voice.

"It's been some rascally boy," answered another, from within the room. "Here is a stone on the floor. The young hound has flung it through the window."

"I'd like to wring his neck," growled the other, savagely. "See that this is mended tomorrow."

"Ay, ay."

The window was lowered, and the men retired.

"Mighty neat notion about that stone," said Hal, with a chuckle of triumph. "It's flung them clean off the track."

"Pretty cute, that's a fact."

In a few minutes more the door of the house again opened. Hal was quickly up and at his lookout hole.

But all he saw were the backs of three stoutish men, who had turned from the door, and were walking down the street.

"Wonder if the lark'll sing to-night?" queried one, with a grating laugh.

"Not loud enough to wake up the owls," came the answer.

This was all that Hal caught. The men walked briskly away.

"I wish I knew how many went in," remarked Hal, doubtfully.

"They might have left some of the party behind."

"I'm afraid so."

"There's one thing I'm sure of."

"What's that?"

"They've left that woman behind."

"That's sure."

"What's your idea, Hal?"

"To go for her."

"That's mine."

"Then let's go for her, guard or no guard."

"I'm with you."

The agile and excited lads lost no time. Within two minutes they had mounted the arbor, opened the window, and were inside the house once more.

They listened. All was still within. No sign of a light was visible.

Walking stealthily they made their way through the darkness to the door of the prison room. They had traversed the route often enough to know it well.

As they neared the door a low, strange sound reached their ears. It sounded like the sobs of a woman.

"There's sweet work here," said Hal.

"Open the door," commanded Jack.

Low as their voices were the captive seemed to hear them. The sobs ceased. The woman seemed listening.

Hal carefully slipped back the bolts, and turned the key, which stood in the lock.

"Don't be frightened. We're friends," he said, as he opened the door.

He had hardly done so ere the captive burst suddenly out, with a loud cry, and darting between them, rushed for the stairs.

They had had time to see, by the light that came from a lamp in the room, that she was a young and handsome woman, of slender, graceful form, and as supple as a deer in her movements.

Hal saw more. He had caught but a glimpse of her face. But it was enough to tell him that he saw the woman of the portrait, the mysterious occupant of the carriage.

The fugitive was at the foot of the stairs ere they could recover from their surprise and start in pursuit.

A second wild cry came from her lips as she hurried down the second flight.

As she did so a door opened below, and steps came out to the hall. A cry of alarm and surprise came up to the ears of the pursuers.

They by this time had the fugitive again in sight. She had gained the lower hall, and was flying for the front door.

But the figure of a man stood between her and

it, with outstretched arms, ready to arrest her flight.

"You hound! Don't touch that woman, on your life!"

It was the voice of Hal that spoke.

The man below was thrown off his guard by this unexpected voice. He looked upward in astonishment.

Instantly the nimble fugitive slipped under his arm, darted to the door, and flung it open. One quick spring took her light form into the street.

With a loud oath the baffled guard turned in pursuit. But he had not taken two steps before he felt himself drawn sternly back by a strong hand on his shoulder.

"Guess you'd best stay here a while, Jerry Bounce," came in Jack Riley's mocking tones. "You keep after the lady, Hal. Leave me to handle this coon. I owe him a settler."

On dashed Hal, in swift pursuit.

Jack held with a grip of steel to his struggling prisoner.

CHAPTER XII.

HAL PRINCE IN CLOVER.

OUTSIDE the prison-house the fair fugitive swiftly sped, with the rapid flight of a frightened deer. Yet in her alarm she had taken the wrong direction, and was flying from instead of toward the city.

But she had not taken many steps from the house ere a light form sprung from a lurking-place close by and started in pursuit.

A cry came from the lips of the youthful figure, a cry that reached the woman's ears, for she sped along more swiftly than ever.

"Stop!" he cried. "Ain't no use runnin'. Got 'em posted all round. You can't git away, nary time."

This assurance only had the effect to add speed to the flight of the fugitive. She was wonderfully light and active, and seemed to fly along like a bird on the wing.

It was a pace, however, which she could hardly keep up. After flying at this rate for two or three hundred yards she was obliged to check her speed.

The youthful pursuer, who had had the wit to husband his strength, now began to gain on her.

Suddenly she stumbled and fell headlong. She lay prostrate for a moment, as if stunned, and then weakly endeavored to regain her feet.

Just as she did so the pursuer came up, and rudely grasped her arm.

"Didn't work that time, ma'am," he said, with a grin of triumph. "Kinder rough on you, but I guess you'll have to toddle back."

"Release me, sir," came in feeble but indignant tones. "I shall never go back to that house."

"Now don't you try cuttin' up no capers. All I's got to do is to whistle, and I'll fotch 'em all round yere. Best come 'long quiet."

"Never!" she cried, jerking her arm loose from his grasp. "Touch me again on your peril."

"Oh, come now, ma'am! Ain't wuth while goin' inter any highstrikes. Dunno what you want, anyhow. It hits me as we've got things rigged up mighty comf'able."

"That house! That dreadful house!" she repeated, with a shudder.

"Oh, come 'long! Ain't got no time ter stand here all night blowin'. Dunno how you got out; but I know mighty well you're goin' back."

The young villain seized her arm again in a vicious grip. She struggled to release herself, but he held on grimly.

Overcome with terror and emotion she burst into a flood of tears.

"Oh, release me! I will pay you anything, anything! Only let me go!"

"You'll have to peg down lively, ma'am. 'Cause t'other side pays well. What'll you pony up if I'll let you go?"

"Here! Take my purse! Take all that's in it! Only let me go!" she pleaded in pitiful tones, as if quite overcome with fear and excitement.

"Much 'bliged, ma'am," answered the young villain, eagerly grasping the purse. "I'll take keer o' this fur you, so nobody else 'll git it. Kinder sorry you got to go back. But orders is orders."

The next moment a yell of terror came from his lips. He released the lady's arm, and danced with pain.

For a strong hand had laid hold of his ear, in a pinch that made the boy squeal like a stuck pig. And another hand jerked the purse from his grip.

"Got you again, Toby," spoke the mocking tones of Hal Prince. "I'm getting to be your bad angel, ain't I? Dance, you young villain! Don't be frightened, miss. I am your friend."

"Le' go my ear!" yelled the young rogue, "Oh! le' go my ear!"

"Won't do it till you own up. Who is it that hired you to do this?"

"Don't know."

"Where do they live, and what are their names?"

"Don't know."

"Tell the truth, or I'll twist your ear clear off."

But Toby knew a trick worth two of that. With a sudden squirm he caught Hal's other hand between his teeth, and bit so viciously that the astonished 'prentice hastily released his ear, to protect his hand.

In a moment the eel-like youngster darted down and shot away toward the house, yelling as he went.

"Hang his young hide! I'd like to pull all his teeth!" growled Hal, in a rage.

But returning to a consciousness of the situation, he turned to the young lady, who stood trembling by, as if in doubt what to think of this encounter.

"We must leave here at once," he said, hurriedly. "That screaming boy may bring back your enemies. I was a fool to let him go. Here is your purse. Come with me. I will protect you."

"Who are you?" she said, doubtfully. "You are not taking me to some other prison? You are not one of my enemies? Oh, sir, I know not whom to trust."

"No, no, I am your friend. Look in my face. Do I look like a villain? I saved you once before. The time you were attacked in your carriage in the wood."

"Oh, was it you? Yes, yes, I saw your face then! It is the same! Oh, sir, I owe you life, honor, everything! Quick! Let us fly!"

She seized his hand in wild excitement, and strove to drag him along.

"They will have to kill me before they take you again," declared Hal, as he fixed his eyes in admiration on the tear-stained, agitated, but beautiful face.

They now hurried onward, he sustaining her trembling steps, for a reaction from her late strength had come upon her.

For the next ten minutes not a word passed between them. Hal well knew the importance of getting well away from that dangerous locality, since some of the villains might be within hearing of Toby's cry of alarm.

Sustaining her by an arm around her waist, he hurried her onward, leaving the line of the street, and crossing the open fields that there bordered it, toward the adjoining streets.

As he went he thought something of the situation in which he had left Jack Riley. But he knew that Jack was quite able to handle Jerry Bounce, so that matter did not give him much trouble.

If the truth must be told, Hal was at that moment the happiest 'prentice in Philadelphia. He had fallen in love, as we have said, with the picture of the lovely girl whose waist his arm now encircled. But to be so near her, to feel her warm breath on his cheek, and yet to feel, by something indefinable in her dress and manner, that she was far above him in station, though chance had leveled the distinction between them, filled him with hope and bliss.

"There's no fence so high but a bold heart may climb it," said the daring fellow to himself. "If I am only a 'prentice I've got the heart of a king. The knights of old thought themselves the equal of the highest ladies in the land. I think I've got some knightly blood in my veins."

By this time they were at a considerable distance from the scene of danger. They had reached Fifth street, and were now in the built-up region of the city.

The young lady seemed to have recovered from her terror, and to be returning to a consciousness of the situation.

"I am stronger now," she said, releasing herself from his supporting arm, with a faint blush of consciousness. "I am ever so deeply indebted to you. I owe you a debt of gratitude which I can never repay."

"Don't say one word about that," cried Hal, gallantly. "Do you suppose I would not cut my head off for you? Or run my fist into the fire? If I wouldn't I ought to be kicked, that's all. What made you run so, miss, when we opened that door?"

"Was it you that opened the door of that dreadful room?"

"Me and my crony. Didn't you slide, though? I never thought any girl could run so fast."

"I thought it was my enemies," she replied, with a faint smile. "I determined, if the door was opened, to make a dash for freedom. I never stopped to think or look."

"That's so. I don't believe any of us would have caught you if you hadn't tumbled. It was just as pretty a race as I ever saw. And as pretty a girl in the lead as anybody'd care to see."

"No flattery, please," she said, with a charming look. "We can spare all that. If I did run fast you lost no time in following, Mr.—Excuse me, but I would like to know your name."

"Harry Prince. Or Hal Prince, as they generally call me. I'm only a locksmith's 'prentice, but I've got a big heart under my leather apron. I hope you won't mind telling me your name."

"I would not be very polite in refusing your request. You may call me Miss Clifford, or Miss May Clifford."

"I'm ever so much obliged. Excuse me for saying, Miss Clifford, that there's something very queer and mysterious about you."

"Indeed! I was not aware of it."
 "Yes. Who are these people who are trying to get hold of you? What do they want?"
 "I am sure I don't know."
 "Well, that's queer, anyhow. I saw them when they drove up to that house. Do you know your coachman was one of the party?"
 "My coachman?" she exclaimed, with a start of surprise.
 "Yes. I saw one of them make signs to the rascal, and then he drove off."
 "Can that be?" she cried, with a look of dismay. "I fancied he was driving me out of the way."
 "He isn't an old hand?"
 "No. He was only engaged a week ago."
 "Do you know that you are surrounded with enemies?"
 "I fear so."
 "And you don't know who they are?"
 "I wish I did."
 "Nor what they are after?"
 "Are you not asking too many questions, Mr. Prince?"
 "But I ought to know. I am working for you, tooth and nail. But I can't half work if I have to do it in the dark."
 The young lady turned and looked at him earnestly by the light of the street lamp near by. She seemed trying to discover how far she could trust him.
 "You said there was something mysterious about me. What did you mean by that?" she demanded.
 "Because nobody seems to know anything about you, and there's a gang that nobody knows that's trying their level best to run away with you. They've got a picture of you, too. How did they get that?"
 "A picture of me?" she exclaimed, with another start.
 "Yes. And I think they use it so that their rascally agents may know you. There's some big guns behind this, Miss Clifford. But 'tain't them that's doing the work. They're only giving the orders."
 She made no answer, but seemed listening and reflecting.
 "I've seen another picture of you. A beautiful oil-painting."
 "Oh! It seems there is no end of my pictures. Where did you see that, pray?"
 "At the house of Miss Perkins, down Fourth street."
 "Ah!"
 There was a strange mistrust in this exclamation.
 "Yes. And there's the mystery. Miss Perkins says you ought to be five hundred miles away, and that it is impossible you could be here. I told her I saw you. But she would not believe me."
 "You? You told her you saw me?"
 There was a mingled fierceness and terror in these words. She seized his arm in a hard grip and looked him sternly in the eyes.
 "Yes," he faltered. "Is there any harm in that?"
 "You told her? She knows I am here?"
 "Why—yes, Miss Clifford."
 "Then all is lost! You have ruined me!"
 She released his arm and fell back several steps, her eyes still fixed on him with that strange glance.
 Hal stood silent and irresolute. He had stirred a hornets' nest in earnest.
 After a moment she suddenly broke from her rigid attitude. Her face relaxed.
 She turned again to Hal.
 "Perhaps I am wronging you. You may have done it all for the best. But you do not know the harm you have done."
 "I trust you are truly my friend. Where may you be found, Mr. Prince, if I should need a friend and protector?"
 "At Pat Lyon's locksmith shop. Everybody knows where that is."
 His listener staggered as if she had been struck. Her face grew suddenly pale. She thrust out her arm as if to protect herself. Hal gazed at her more nonplussed than ever. He was in a perfect maze.
 "Excuse me," she said. "I am a little sick, I fear. Will you be kind enough to ring at the fifth door on this side? I will rest here for a moment while you do so."
 She leaned against a house on the corner where they now stood. Hal advanced quickly to obey her directions.
 "So I've found out where she lives, anyhow," he said to himself, as he pulled the bell.
 He waited till the ring was answered.
 "There's a lady at the corner asked me to ring," he said. "Miss Clifford. Wait a moment and I will call her."
 "Miss Clifford? I don't know her," said the woman who had answered the bell.
 "She is just here."
 He hastened back to where he had left her. To his utter surprise, no one was there.
 He looked down the side street. No one was visible. And then it dawned on him that he had been the victim of a cunning ruse.
 The cunning and mysterious lady had disappeared and left her 'prentice friend in the lurch.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOCUMENTS IN THE CASE.

THE adventures of that evening were not yet over. After Hal had made a futile search for the nimble-footed young lady who had so neatly left him in the lurch, he gave it up in disgust, and concluded that it was his duty to go and look up Jack Riley.
 "I've never been so sweetly sold in my life," he declared. "Talk about your tricks! Why, that girl's fuller of them than an egg is of meat. Look at how she slid when Jack and I opened that door! And now she's made just as slick a slide. I know girls and eels are hard to hold, but she goes ahead of the slipperiest eel I ever come across."
 He was too disgusted for further words, and fell into silence as he made his way toward the empty house. But he could not help thinking, and it was impossible for him to get that bright, lovely face and charming air and manner out of his mind. She had half bewitched him, and her flight had made him only the more entranced. So much of mystery being round her that the affair to him was becoming a sort of witchcraft. He silently made up his mind that he would find her yet, and unfold this mystery, despite all obstacles.
 He was not long in reaching the locality of the house in question. All about it seemed deserted. Not a trace of man or boy was to be found.
 He approached cautiously, fearing an ambush. Keeping close to the fence, he carefully glided toward the mansion, watching every point in the vicinity.
 Thus he gained the corner of the fence near the house front, and gazed cautiously around it toward the front door.
 But this was tightly closed, and not a sound or other indication came from the interior.
 "Maybe that young imp has fetched them up and they've nabbed Jack," he muttered. "I've a notion to go for the boys and make things rattle round this old shanty. I might get nabbed myself if I keep fooling round here without help."
 He drew back in doubt whether to bring up the 'prentices and attack the castle in force, or to climb the fence and try the window again. The only check to this last idea was that the window route might have been discovered, and an ambush laid for him.
 His doubt was brought to an end by an unexpected occurrence. He had not retreated far along the fence, when he saw a person approaching. It seemed a youthful figure, and at first sight he imagined it might be the boy, Toby.
 Ere he could take any steps at concealment a whistle met his ears that gave him a different idea. It was the signal of the 'prentices. Instantly Hal answered it.
 The boy came running hastily up.
 "Is that you, Hal?"
 "Yes. Who are you?"
 "Joe Morse. I've been sent to look you up. The boys has got some gay fun."
 "Who sent you?"
 "Jack Riley."
 "Ha! Where is he? What's up?"
 "Why, he's out here with the fellers. He's got Jerry Bounce, and they're going to give him a warming. Hurry up, 'fore the fun's all over."
 "Got Jerry, has he? Good for Jack. Lay out, little fellow. Let's make tracks."
 Following his young guide, Hal soon found himself in an open field, at a considerable distance from the built-up portion of the city. There were some trees in the center of the field. Around one of these the faint light showed a group of boyish forms.
 Strange sounds came from them, laughs, jeers and wild cries of fear or pain.
 Hal hurried up. A glance showed him the situation. The young rogues were up to mischief. They had Jerry tightly trussed up to the trunk of the tree, his coat off, and his back exposed. One of the youngsters had a bunch of switches, not thick enough to do any serious damage, but likely to be very painful.
 With this he was laying on in stinging blows, as Hal came up, while the yells of the tortured prisoner were drowned in the jeers and laughter of the cruel crowd.
 "What's all this about?" cried Hal, angrily, leaping into the midst of the crowd and grasping the instrument of punishment. "What are you up to?"
 "Let go, Hal," cried Jack Riley, bustling forward. "Jerry's my meat, and I'm going to scorch him. We ain't got no prison to put him in. But the boys has tried him and sentenced him, and the verdict has got to be carried out."
 "Let me go," cried the writhing prisoner. "You'll kill me. Hal, make them let me go!"
 Hal looked at him in doubt. He didn't know but that Jack was about right.
 "How many have you given him?"
 "Thirty. And the verdict's fifty. Got twenty more to lay on."
 "Oh, come! I guess he's been punished enough."
 "Mercy!" pleaded the prisoner. "Make them

cut me loose, Hal! I've always been your friend! Don't let them kill me!"

"See here," said Jack, sternly, as he showed Hal a roll of papers. "We searched the hound and found these in his inside pockets. I know they're full of rascality, the way he begged for them."
 Hal took them and unfolded the papers. It was too dark to read anything, but a single glance gave him an idea as to their character. His lip curled.
 "I've a notion you've hit a nice nest-egg here," he remarked. "There's some ugly deviltry in these documents." He gazed at the prisoner, who had hung his head in terror at seeing Hal take the papers. "Hold on to the hound, boys. Don't let him go. I want to see what's in the wind."
 He hastened away with the papers, across the fields to the city. What they meant he was far from sure, but they looked very much like those that had been found buried in Pat Lyon's yard. Hal felt sure that they were some of the stolen documents from the Drover's Bank, and that he had struck the trail of the true robbers.
 His journey led straight to the office of Alderman Jones. He wanted to deliver his prize as soon as possible to the magistrate, and discover if his suspicions were correct.
 Unfortunately the alderman was not to be found. It was several hours past his office hour. Hal sought him at his home, and at the several localities which he was known to frequent, but in vain.
 He then endeavored to discover a lawyer whom he knew to be interested in the case, but with the same ill success.
 At last he gave it up in despair and went back to where he had left the boys.
 But he had been nearly two hours absent, and they had apparently got tired of waiting. They had disappeared from the scene of their late sport.
 Tired and disappointed Hal made his way slowly back to the city. He felt as if every thing, so far, had gone wrong. Reaching the built-up streets he luckily encountered his late guide, Joe Morse.
 "What's come of them all?" he queried.
 "Got tired o' waiting. You was so mighty long. They let Jerry go home. But they've set a watch on him. He can't get away."
 "That's all right," answered Hal. "If I ain't out in my reckoning the police may have some business for him to-morrow."
 There was nothing further to be done that night, and Hal was pretty well fagged out by his exertions and adventures during the evening. He went home and went to bed, to dream of beautiful damsels locked up in enchanted castles, and of 'prentice knight-errants breaking through the enchantments and releasing the captives. But in every case the rescued beauty vanished from before the eyes of her deliverer.
 The next morning one of the 'prentices shot into the locksmith's shop, just as Hal was opening it up for the day's business.
 "Hallo, Hal!" he cried. "What come o' you last night? Me and another of the boys watched Jerry's house all night. He's there yet. Got to leave now, and go to work. What did you find out 'bout the papers?"
 "Nothing. I couldn't find the alderman or the lawyer. The office don't open till eight o'clock. I guess Jerry won't make himself scarce before that time."
 "He'll have to rub down his back with harts-horn first, to get the scorch out of it," laughed the boy. "We gave him the balance of that fifty, Hal."
 "You did?"
 "Yes, and he ought to had twenty more for tally. That's my notion."
 "Maybe so. I judge he's earned all he got."
 At the stroke of eight Hal called in Miss Lyon, and asked her to keep an eye on the store, telling her the errand which took him away.
 He hurried to the alderman's office, which had been but a few minutes open.
 That worthy was on his official seat, as big and important as ever.
 "Good-morning, young man," he greeted Hal. "Seen you before, hey?"
 "Yes. I'm Pat Lyon's 'prentice."
 "Thought that I knew you. Well, what can I do for you? You're as spry this morning as a kitten at the milk-pan."
 The worthy official seemed good-natured and jocular.
 "I wish you to examine these papers," said Hal, producing the roll found on Jerry. "I came across them last night, and I think they are important."
 "Papers, eh? Let me have them."
 Taking them from Hal's hand, he spread them on the table before him, adjusted his spectacles, and spread himself over them in a somewhat comical fashion.
 As his eyes ran over them his red face grew doubly flushed, and a series of short exclamations of astonishment broke from his lips.
 "Ha!—Hum!—Goodness me!—Well, well, well!—Hillo, boy, where did you get these?"
 "Took them from a young rascal last night,"

replied Hal, satisfied by the manner of the alderman that he must be on the track of something important.

"Ha! Why didn't you bring them sooner?"

"Couldn't find you last night. But we've had him watched all night, so that he couldn't escape."

"You have, eh? You know what these are, then?"

"I think they've got something to do with the Drover's Bank robbery."

"You do? You're a smart youth. Where is the rascal to be found?"

Hal gave him Jerry's address.

The alderman instantly filled an official blank, and gave it to the constable, who had recently entered.

"Serve that immediately," he commanded. "Be spy, or the fellow may slip. And send Tom in here. I want him."

He commenced to write again rapidly.

Another man entered just as he had finished and addressed a couple of notes.

"Here, Tom, take these to their address. If you are asked any questions, you can only tell the gentlemen that I want them as soon as they can come."

Tom disappeared on his errand. The alderman sat balancing his pen, and looking straight before him. After awhile his eyes fell on the expectant youth, who was growing eager with curiosity.

"Hey! You here yet? Forgot you. See here, young man. Have you any witnesses to show where you got these papers?"

"Plenty. Twenty of them if you want."

"You have, hey? Well, maybe that's lucky for you."

"What do you make of the papers, alderman? Have they anything to do with the robbery?"

"Yes," was the short reply.

Alderman Jones sat back in his chair, and seemed to fall into a reverie.

The curiosity of his visitor seemed very little to trouble his official soul.

Hal waited for some ten minutes in growing impatience.

"Won't you tell me what you make of them?"

"No."

This came out so short and sharp that it riled Hal. He had been a little awed by the dignity of the alderman. He was now growing angry.

"I think I've got a right to know, as long as I brought them here, and as long as my boss is in prison in this case. I brought them to you because they strike me as just like the papers that were dug up in the garden."

"Ha! You've discovered that, have you? Then there's only one thing I can tell you."

"And what's that?"

"That you know as much about the affair as I do."

This settled Hal. He had nothing more to say. He sat back discontentedly in his chair, while the alderman amused himself in studying the movements of a fly on the ceiling.

A half-hour more passed. Then the quiet of the aldermanic office was broken by the entrance of two gentlemen, whom Hal at once recognized.

One of them was the president of the Drover's Bank. The other was the cashier, Mr. Judkin.

"What's the matter?" cried the president, importantly. "Why have you sent for us?"

The worthy alderman lowered his eyes from the ceiling to his visitors with an air as if these were some more flies to be investigated.

"Glad to see you, gentlemen," he said, in a short, barking manner. "Hope you were through breakfast. Want you to look over these papers."

He handed them the papers which he had received from Hal. As they seated themselves and opened these documents the eyes of the alderman seemed to fix themselves on the wall, as if in search of another fly to amuse him. But Hal was shrewd enough to see that he was really covertly watching their faces.

"Why, what does this mean?" exclaimed the president. "We have seen and identified these papers before!"

"I feared there might be some mistake," said the alderman, mildly. "I fancied there might be something wrong about the signatures."

"Why, of course there isn't," cried Mr. Judkin. "Those are our signatures. We have told you that already."

"Certainly," chimed in the president. "There is no question about that. This is a strange thing to bring us here in such a hurry for. I don't understand it."

Hal had his eye fixed on the alderman. He scented sport in the wind.

"Pity to trouble you, then. But I've got a couple more papers here I want you to look at."

Opening a locked drawer in his desk, he extracted from it two documents similar in appearance to those held by the bank officers.

"Will you please examine the signatures of these?"

Mr. Judkin and the president took them. They both fell back a pace on looking at them, the former growing pale, the latter red.

"Why, this is a forgery!" exclaimed the president. "What does this mean? It is a facsimile of the other paper. But I never wrote that signature."

Mr. Judkin stood looking at his paper without speaking, and as if spellbound.

"What do you say, Mr. Judkin? Is yours a forgery, too?"

"Undoubtedly! A plain forgery!"

"What are we to understand from this?" demanded the president. "Who made those forgeries? How came they in your possession?"

The alderman fixed his eyes upon his visitors with a queer expression.

"The papers which you have pronounced forgeries are the ones that were dug up in Pat Lyon's garden," he said, slowly and distinctly.

"The originals, which you have just identified, were found last night in possession of another person. I have sent for that person, and expect him here every minute. Gentlemen, it is my opinion that there has been a base conspiracy to ruin the locksmith, Patrick Lyon."

Mr. Judkin fell back in his chair with the look of one who was in a complete quandary. Hal had his eyes fixed on the disturbed face, which showed plain marks of consternation.

As for the president, his face grew redder. He started violently, and exclaimed:

"This is extraordinary! It is utterly beyond my comprehension! This forgery—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the constable, alone.

"Well?" demanded the alderman, fixing his eyes upon him. "Where is your man?"

"Slid. He left the house an hour ago. No one knows where he is."

"Then put the police on his track at once. He must be found, if we have to rake the whole city for him."

CHAPTER XIV.

HAL AND TOBY.

MR. JUDKIN left the alderman's office first. He had seemingly got over his momentary excitement, and looked cool and calm.

"I must leave you, Mr. Hines," he said to the president. "I have a matter at the Board of Brokers to attend to."

Mr. Hines remained in conversation with the alderman. After some minutes' talk Alderman Jones broke out:

"I tell you, sir, you haven't the ghost of a case. If you are wise you will let me order the discharge of this prisoner."

"I don't think so," answered the president, dryly. "He is the only man in Philadelphia that could unlock that vault."

"Except the man who stole the key," retorted the alderman.

"Ha! what do you mean? Do you suspect—"

"You are not green enough to fancy that lost key walked off on two legs of its own? That key has not gone into thin air. The man that has it is the one that robbed the bank, and that hid these forgeries in the locksmith's yard, for the purpose of throwing suspicion on him."

"Why did he not hide the originals, then? Why should he have taken the trouble to make copies?"

"That's what puzzles me," admitted the alderman. "There's a knotty point I don't see through. It's not all plain sailing in this business. There are wheels within wheels."

"I don't know just what to do," rejoined the president. "I must consult my directors. For my part I believe the locksmith guilty."

"You'll want stronger evidence to convict him. And if you hold him in prison on this count you open yourself to an action for damages."

The president settled his hat on his head.

"I will advise you of our decision," he said, as he walked out.

The alderman looked after him.

"There goes a man without a backbone," he growled. "He's afraid to speak out his mind like a man.—Now where's that 'prentice? Ha! He's gone, has he?"

Hal had gone, in fact, ten minutes before. He was particularly interested in Mr. Judkin, and had slyly followed that worthy from the room.

Reaching the street Hal kept the cashier under his eye, though at a considerable distance in the rear. He was anxious to see just what sort of a Board of Brokers Mr. Judkin was going to.

The cashier, as he walked along, showed signs of excitement. His hands were thrown up impulsively, and his pace changed from fast to slow, and to fast again, as if he was troubled by uneasy thoughts.

He had no trouble to keep him in view. Mr. Judkin evidently did not dream of such a thing as pursuit.

Only when he had reached the corner of a narrow court, in an unpleasant neighborhood, did he come to a halt and look anxiously around him.

Hal had caught the movement in time, and managed to slip behind a tree on the sidewalk.

After a careful observation of the locality, and of all persons within sight, Mr. Judkin

seemed satisfied, and turned into the court with a quick movement.

"That's just the gayest place for a Board of Broker's that I ever heard of," said Hal, with a grin of satisfaction. "Looks kind of blue for the old boozier. I'd like to see some of them brokers."

He hurried up to the entrance of the court. Here he remained under cover, just slipping an eye round the corner of the house that concealed him.

There stood Mr. Judkin. And before him was a youthful form whom Hal recognized at sight as Toby. A conversation seemed going on between the two worthies.

"I knew it!" cried Hal, slapping his knee in excitement. "I knew the old coon was up to some joke. So Toby and he are chums? That's a mighty good point. And there's some cake on the fire now that's Toby's to bake. I wonder if I can't get a taste of that cake?"

The conversation was not a long one. Hal drew back into a doorway as he saw the direct- or turn toward the street. In a minute more he appeared and walked away with a stately step, with nothing to show that he dreamed of being watched.

Hal let him go. He had no further business with Mr. Judkin just now. Toby was his next game.

He waited quietly. The court was a blind one. It could be left only by the one passage. After several minutes the boy made his appearance.

He was loudly whistling, and stood at the corner balancing himself on one leg as if at a loss for amusement. But his keen eyes seemed to wander over the whole locality.

Hal was seated on a doorstep at some distance down the street, with his hat drawn well over his eyes.

After a minute Toby started away, still whistling. Hal let him get some distance ahead before he put himself in pursuit.

He soon found that he had a sharper personage than Mr. Judkin to deal with.

The boy was as uneasy as a ferret, twisting and turning at unexpected intervals, and halting to inspect every trifle, as if he had nothing to do but to kill time.

He stopped short at one street corner and looked so sharply back that Hal could but draw his hat down further and walk steadily past, on the other side of the street.

When he looked back over his shoulder after gaining some paces, there was no trace of the boy to be seen.

He had evidently turned down the side street.

Hal hurried back to the corner. But it was only to find that the keen little rascal had been too sharp for him. He had disappeared.

The street was one that had several alleys and courts opening into it. These he hastened to investigate. But no sign of Toby was to be seen. He had slipped away through some passage known only to himself, and completely distanced his pursuer.

With a growl of disappointed rage, Hal gave up the useless task.

"I thought I was doing it smart," he said. "But that boy's a perfect terror. Guess I'm no use here. I'm sold on this lay. But if I don't get even with Mr. Toby yet, then I'll sell out for a song."

He hastened away toward the locksmith's shop, satisfied that he had exhausted his chances for that time. There was nothing left but to watch and wait.

It cannot be said that Hal did much useful work that day. He was too uneasy and excited to bring himself down to steady labor, and he browsed round the shop much like a cat in a strange garret.

He did not fail to acquaint Miss Lyon with what had occurred, and much relieved that good lady's mind by showing to her that the chances had turned in favor of her brother.

"There's one point I'd like to make out," he said. "I'd give something to know what old Judkin was after, and what trick he put Toby up to. I know mighty well that's one move in the game."

Good luck helped him in this wish. During the noon hour one of the 'prentices entered the shop in great haste.

"I saw Jerry Bounce this morning," he announced. "Him and that boy Toby were under the window of our shop, talking away mighty busy. I happened to stick my head out and spied them."

"Ah!" cried Hal, in deep interest. "That's news, anyhow. So that's the dodge! You didn't hear what they were talking about?"

"Not much of it. But I heard a few words. That's what brought me here. Toby told him that there was the very old Davy to pay, and that he'd got to slide. He told him, too, that the old man was hopping mad about something he'd done."

"You're sure of that?"

"Them was the very words. And Jerry said that was just what he was going to do, but the old coon would have to plank down the cash. Said he'd got everything in shape to cut stick. That's all I heard."

"That's something worth hearing," cried Hal, energetically. "You're a regular daisy, Jake. That's my cue for a fortune."

"You know what's in the wind, then?"

"I should smile if I didn't. And I'm going to put a brake on Jerry Bounce's wheels, if it ain't too late. He's a rascal from the word go."

A half-hour afterward found Hal again in Alderman Jones's office. He had changed his mind about that worthy official, and began to think that his rough way concealed a shrewd head and an honest heart.

He decided to open up his case to the worthy alderman. It was growing so complicated that he felt the need of some advice from an older head than his own.

"Got something to tell me, hey? Well, as I haven't anybody to send to jail just now, and no other sport on hand, I won't mind listening, if you'll talk short and to the point."

"I'll do that," said Hal.

He proceeded to tell the whole story of his adventures, with the suppression of one point only, that of the finding of the hidden paper. He did not feel that he had the right to reveal that until Pat Lyon was first told of it.

The alderman listened with great interest, breaking out in short exclamations at every special point.

"Well, well, well!" he cried, as Hal ended. "This is a twisted rope in good earnest. You won't be sorry you told me this story, my boy. If I haven't a longer head, at any rate I've an older head than you. And justice is my business, no matter who it pinches. So I thought Judkin took that forgery in a queer way."

"Haden't something best be done to arrest Jerry Bounce before he gets away?" asked Hal. "Yes. The police have his description. But I'll stir them up."

He wrote something hastily, and called in a messenger.

"Here. Take that to the Central. And lose no time."

He turned again to Hal.

"Glad you come, boy. You've opened my eyes a bit. Don't forget that I'm your friend in this business, and that an old bird is wiser than a young one. If anything else happens, post me. And find out who that girl is, if you can."

"I will," said Hal, fervently.

"That's all. Except one thing. I've got word from the bank that they're going to push the prosecution against Pat Lyon. They refuse to withdraw the charge."

Hal returned to the shop. He felt that he had done all that he could do, and that nothing was left but to wait events. There was one thing he began to see, however. That shrewd street rat, Toby, young as he was, seemed to be one of the main agents of the rascally movers in this affair. That youngster needed watching, the worst way. But he was a slippery one to watch. Hal determined to set the whole crowd of 'prentices on his track.

That night, after closing the store and finishing his supper, he put his resolve in execution. He knew where to meet the boys, and he told them of his suspicions.

Several of them knew Toby by sight, and they readily agreed to keep an eye upon him.

Later that evening Hal carried out another plan that was in his mind. He proceeded to the isolated house where he had had an adventure on a former occasion. Here he concealed himself in the shrubbery, and gave the peculiar signal whistle which he had agreed upon with the girl, Kate.

He waited for some time, and repeated the signal before she made her appearance. She was flustered and uneasy.

"Have they been back since?" he asked, after he had succeeded in quieting the frightened girl.

"Yes. They are in the house now."

"You don't say that? In the same room?"

"Yes."

"You must take me to the hiding-place again, Kate."

"No, no! I dare not do it."

"You must, I say. Do you think I'd let them hurt you? I've got all the police of the city on my side."

"But just think what they may do!"

"I'm thinking of what I'm going to do."

After some long-continued persuasion he succeeded in overcoming the dread of the timid girl. She consented to introduce him into the house, by way of the side window through which he had formerly escaped.

A few minutes sufficed for this.

"Now you go back to the kitchen," whispered Hal. "I know the way. I don't want you mixed in it."

Leaving her to do so he cautiously made his way up-stairs to the central room in which he had formerly been concealed.

Entering he discovered that the small window was partly open, and that a light was in the adjoining room. The sound of voices came to his ears.

The spy eagerly but slyly made his way to the lookout window.

He looked through it. The persons speaking were not within the range of his eyes. Nor could he make out their words. He pressed closer up, and listened intently.

At that instant the door of the room, which he had left slightly ajar, was slammed sharply to, and the key was turned in the lock with a loud click. A sound of mocking laughter came to him from the hall without.

He fell back in utter dismay. What did this mean? Was he caught in a trap?

The next moment he heard a sharp but familiar voice in the room below.

"I cotched your rat!" it cried. "Walked plum in the trap, he did, and it's sprung on him! Oh, lawsee! ain't it prime!"

A shout of impish laughter followed.

Hal listened in greater dismay and surprise than ever.

It was the voice of the boy Toby. The shrewd young rascal had turned the tables on his pursuer with a vengeance.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TABLES TURNED ON TOBY.

SHARP as Hal was, he was less experienced in the business of playing the spy than Toby. That wide-awake youth had not only discovered him on his track, and escaped from his pursuit, but had retaliated by following him to the house in which he had been so neatly trapped.

It was Toby who had informed his employers of Hal's object, and had arranged with them the plan by which he had been so neatly caught.

There was only one part of the business that had escaped the eyes of the young scout. He had not seen Hal's interview with Kate. The share taken by this young lady in the business had as yet escaped suspicion, fortunately for the prisoner.

But of this Hal was not aware, and his dismay at his own capture was accompanied with fear of some disastrous consequences to his fair confederate.

"Hope you'll like your quarters, young gentleman," came in a mocking tone from below. "You walked in there without an invitation. You can stay till you are invited to leave. As long as you are so anxious to visit us we hope you'll make a long stay."

Hal bit his lip in spite.

"I'll see who they are, anyhow," he said to himself. "No use hiding my head now. I've got to face the music."

Throwing the hinged window wide open, he thrust his head through and gazed into the next room. But he was a moment too late. The two men were just leaving. One of them had already disappeared, and he caught but a momentary glimpse of the other.

The back of the man reminded him somewhat of Mr. Judkin, but of that he could not be sure. One person remained in the room, however, the boy Toby. But on the face of the latter was a look of impish delight that was anything but agreeable to the prisoner.

"How d'ye do?" he queried, nodding his head roguishly. "Don't b'lieve I ever see'd sich a good-lookin' fellar. Looks jist like a pictur' in a frame."

"You blazing young rat, I'll bu'st your boiler yet for this," cried Hal, spitefully.

"Like ter see you do't," answered Toby, squaring off valiantly. "Guess I'm some on muscle. Jist step down yere. Wouldn't like nothin' better'n to guv yer a lesson."

The waspish accents of the imp doubled Hal's fury. Without a moment's consideration he attempted to force himself headlong through the window. Unluckily it was too narrow for his broad shoulders. Yet he thrust himself so fiercely forward that he stuck fast in the narrow aperture, unable to get either in or out.

The delight of Toby at this misfortune of his victim was extravagant. He danced and capered like a veritable Robin Goodfellow. He broke into peals of mocking laughter, thrust his fingers to his nose, and made every imaginable gesture of contempt of his helpless antagonist.

"Goody gracious! ain't he nipped nice!" squealed the imp. "Can't git in or out. My, don't I wish they'd stayed! It's too good jist fur one little fellar to take in. Oh Jiminy! I can't hardly talk fur laughin'."

"You blamed young hound!" yelled Hal.

"I'll be up with you yet for this."

"Don't s'pose I keer fur you? You couldn't lick a 'skeeter. I ain't forgot the time you pinched my ears, and made me squeal murder. And I'm jist goin' ter pay you up for't. Oh my! ain't it fun?"

The young rascal meant it. Mounting a chair he brought himself within easy reach of his victim's face.

Laughing and jabbering, with his face almost touching that of the helpless prisoner, he began a series of insults and tortures, pinching, slapping the face, and pulling the ears with a spiteful fury, as if he wanted to tear them from their sockets.

"How d'ye like it?" he queried. "Ain't it fun! Why don't you squeal and yell murder, jist like I did? You ain't half a fellar, keepin' quiet as a pump-handle. Bet I make you squeal 'fore I'm done."

He grasped Hal's nose and gave it a sharp tweak. It was the final insult, and an unlucky one for the insulter.

For, with a violent effort Hal managed to jerk

himself loose, and release his shoulders from their tight fit.

Instantly he shot one arm through the window and grasped Toby by the matted hair. The tables were decidedly turned. The young rat made such a violent effort to escape that he kicked over his chair and left himself hanging by his hair.

A squeal as of a stuck pig came from the little rascal's lips. He kicked and plunged violently, but the hair held its own, and Hal's strong hand kept its grip.

"Oh, my, ain't it fun!" he retorted. "Why don't you squeal and holler, eh, Toby? It's my turn now, and I think I'll make you squeal a little more before I'm done. I know you can't help liking it."

Holding the struggling imp with one hand, he thrust out the other and pinched Toby's ears and tweaked his nose, until the whole house resounded with the yells and appeals for mercy of the vagrant.

The scene ended with the rush of two women into the room in alarm at the outcry.

One of these was Hal's friend Kate. The other was an older woman, the genius of the kitchen.

"Vat's all dis mean?" she cried, with a Dutch accent. "Vat you doin' mit dat poy?"

"Only teaching him to dance," answered Hal. "Where are the men of the house? Why don't they come in to see the fun?"

"They're all gone," answered Kate. "Oh, let him drop! You'll kill the boy."

"Kill him? You could kill a cat easier. Toby and I have been having a jolly good time together. Ain't we, Toby?"

"Let me go!" squealed the boy. "Make him let me go! He's murderin' me."

At this the Dutch woman rushed forward, her broad face inflamed.

"You lets dat poy go! You von pig rascal!"

She caught Toby by the heels and pulled violently. Hal still gripped his hair.

The boy yelled as if he was being pulled in half between them.

Suddenly Hal let go. Down came the lad, bumping his skull against the good woman's shins, while she held him heels upward in the air.

The result was more than she bargained for. She tumbled in a heap to the floor, still clinging to Toby's heels, and began to scream in her turn as if she was being killed.

The squirming boy coiled round her like a snake and hindered every effort to rise.

Hal broke into a loud laugh, in which Kate could not help joining.

The whole affair had become utterly ridiculous.

"Say, Kate," whispered Hal, "they've caught me, and got me locked in here. Slip round and unlock the door before that rat gets loose."

Kate took the hint and disappeared from the room. In a minute more the Dutchwoman managed to get free, and rose to her feet, a gush of vituperation bursting from her lips. But it was Toby that caught it this time. She had forgotten the real author of the mischief, and showered threats and blows on Toby, until he ran wildly from the room, followed furiously by the angry cook.

Hal's laughter at the incident was broken short by the reappearance of Kate.

"I can't get it open," she said. "They have locked it, and carried away the key."

"Then I'll burst it open," he cried, furiously.

He rushed across the room and flung himself violently against the door. But his effort was vain. The door was solid and strong, and failed to yield to his furious thrust.

After a few minutes spent in futile efforts, he returned to the window. Kate still anxiously waited in the room.

"They've got me, Kate," he said. "I can't burst it open."

"What will you do?" she queried, wringing her hands in distress. "I'm afraid they'll kill you. And me too."

"If I had my tools now I'd soon get through that lock."

"Can't I get them?"

"You're not afraid to go a mile or two?"

"No, no! I'll do anything."

"Wait," he cried, hopefully.

He took a slip of paper from his pocket and wrote on it hastily with a pencil.

"You know where the locksmith's shop is?" he said. "Go to the house, and hand that to Miss Lyon. She'll give you the tools."

"I'll do it," said Kate, fervently. "And I'll lose no time."

"Look out that boy don't see you go out. He's as sharp as a knitting-needle. He'll get you into some trouble if he sees you."

"I'll look out," answered Kate, as she withdrew from the room, with a look of resolution on her pretty face.

It was evident that Hal had got on the right side of that young lady. And the rogue was keen enough to know it. A shrewd smile came to his lips.

"There's nothing like having a friend at court," he muttered. "Kate would cut her head off for me. I hope she ain't tumbling in love

with me, for I haven't any of that commodity to give away."

He turned from the window and inspected his prison, by the light of the lamp that still burned in the adjoining room.

It occupied the center of the house, and had no outlet except the small window and the locked door. It had evidently been built as a sort of store-room, but it came in excellently as a prison.

"I'm good for an hour or two, anyhow," he said. "If Kate only brings them tools this place won't hold me long. But she's got to look out for Toby, for he's a sharper of the worst kind. And I don't calculate that young gentleman loves me much just now."

He laughed gayly as he flung himself on the floor. The late scene came again to his mind, and he felt that he had rather got the best of Master Toby in that business.

In five minutes he was fast asleep. His late exertions had wearied him, and sleep was never long in visiting his young eyes.

How long he slept he knew not. He was awakened by something pulling upon him from the window. He sprang hastily up, but was called to a sense of the situation by a low warning sound from the voice of his messenger.

"Hist!" said Kate, in a half-whisper. "I've got them, but I've had the hardest time. I'm afraid the cook is watching me."

"You needn't care for her."

"She's one of their spies. I'm dreadfully afraid of them."

"You'd best leave this house with me, Kate. I'll find you a place."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare to. I'm so afraid of them all. I saw the cook was watching me, and I had to go regular to bed, and wait till she was asleep."

"What time is it now?"

"Most one o'clock."

"The deuce! Have the men come back?"

"No."

"Hand me the tools."

She passed him a paper parcel through the window.

"Now, Kate," he said, decisively, "I want you to hear me. You sha'n't stay in this house, that's flat. Just bundle up your things, whatever you want to take with you, and slip down and wait for me in the shrubbery."

"Oh, dear! I'm ever so afraid!"

"If you don't I'll stay here, that's all. I won't go and leave you here."

"Do you think they'll suspect me?"

"Yes. The old woman does now. It's not safe for you here. Outside of here I can take care of you."

"You're right," she said, resolutely. "I'll do it. You won't think hard of me to run away at midnight?"

"With a chap of my figure? No," he laughed. "I'd think you a fool if you didn't take the chance. Off with you, Kate. I'm only joking. Be sure and meet me."

Kate, trembling, but resolved, left the room. The lamp yet burned, throwing its light into Hal's prison-chamber. He quickly unrolled the package she had brought, and examined its contents.

"They're all right," he said, with an air of satisfaction. "It'll have to be more than an everyday lock if I can't open it."

It seemed to be more than an everyday lock, for he worked at it a considerable time without effect. Tired at length with his efforts, and fearful of interruption, he concluded to adopt more radical measures. A few minutes' work with a chisel opened a way to where the bolt of the lock entered its socket.

Then, selecting a fine saw from among his tools, he began the task of sawing through the bolt. The well-tempered steel cut shrewdly into the iron, yet with a shrill grating that he did not like. By a plentiful use of oil, however, he managed to reduce this noise.

"There!" he cried, at length, as the saw finished its road through the iron. "That's done. Now for liberty and Kate."

Placing his tools carefully in his pocket, he turned the knob of the door. It opened easily. The lock that had held it so firm had lost its power before the skill of the young locksmith.

He left the room without hesitation, and with little care to muffle the sound of his steps. There was no one in the house whom he need fear.

It was pitch dark outside, but he knew the way now too well to care for that. A few minutes brought him to the window by which he had entered. Opening the shutters he sprang lightly out, and pushed them to behind him.

He advanced some steps into the bushes.

"Kate!" he cried, cautiously.

There was a fluttering sound, and then Kate appeared before him, with a flustered and anxious face.

"You're sure it's all right?" she asked, laying her two hands on his arm, and looking up doubtfully, but confidingly in his face.

"You bet it's all right, little one," he said, cheerfully. "Keep up your spirits, girl. You've got all the 'prentices of Philadelphia on your side, and they're no slouches when they get started. Where's your bundle?"

"Here," she said, dragging forward a huge package.

"Whew! You ought to have a trunk. Give me that. It's too much for you. Now follow me, Kate, and don't fear man or beast."

He led the way, she following.

Hal trudged strongly on, with the bundle on his shoulders. She begged now and then to let her carry it, but he paid no heed to her remonstrances.

A half-hour's walk in which he shrewdly avoided the routes of the police, brought him to the locksmith's door.

He quickly admitted himself and his companion with a latch-key.

"Now don't be scared, little one," he said. "I'll call Miss Lyon. You needn't be afraid but you'll be taken good care of."

He was as good as his word. In a few minutes Kate was placed in care of the lady of the house, with a brief explanation, and Hal retired to his bed, quite satisfied with his night's work.

CHAPTER XVI.

HAL GETS SEVERAL SURPRISES.

On the morning after the events narrated in the last chapter Hal rose at his usual hour and took his breakfast with Miss Lyon and Kate, who was up betimes, with a look of timidity and anxiety on her pretty face.

He took the opportunity to explain more fully to Miss Lyon the adventures of the previous night, and how he had come to bring her a guest.

Kate looked pleadingly into the face of the good lady, which had at first worn a somewhat severe expression.

"I knew you would let her stay here until she could get a place," he said.

"Why, certainly," said Miss Lyon, softening. "She is a very good girl, I have no doubt. Don't be frightened, my dear. No harm can come to you here."

"I have nobody to take care of me," faltered Kate. "And they're such dreadful people. I'm so afraid of them."

"You needn't care for them here," remarked Hal, cheerfully. "I'd like to see them put their noses in this house."

"I think they'd go out faster than they came in," said Miss Lyon, valiantly. "But what makes them so dreadful?"

"I dare not say one word. They made me swear I wouldn't," faltered the poor girl.

"But you didn't swear not to know them if you should see them?" asked Hal.

"No, I didn't swear that."

"Then there's a gentleman I want you to see, and tell me if he's one of them."

"Oh, I'd be ever so afraid!"

"Why, you little kitten, do you suppose he'd hurt you while I was about?"

"You don't know what men they are."

"No; but I want to," laughed Hal. "And I'm bound to, that's more. But we'll talk about that another time."

He rose from the table and made his way toward the shop, it being the hour for opening.

It was dark in the salesroom when he entered, but enough light came in to show him that there was something wrong.

He stumbled over a loose board on the floor.

"What's up here?" he muttered, as he made his way to the nearest window.

On attempting to unbolt this to his surprise he found that the bolt was already shot back. He was sure that he had bolted it overnight. A growing sense of something wrong came upon him.

A strong shove from his arm sent the two shutters flying open and admitted a flood of the morning light.

Hal turned and looked behind him, with a sharp exclamation of surprise.

He was right. Some one had been at work there during the night. And a glance showed him that it was not the work of ordinary burglars. It was that mysterious document they were after.

He looked at the scene with anger and dismay. The whole of the woodwork around the chimney had been torn loose and lay on the floor. Even the surbase had been wrenched from its place.

The remains of half-burned candles lay here and there. The dust of a century had been disturbed and thickly covered everything. The tools of the locksmith were scattered about, showing that they had been freely used in this work.

Hal stood as if spellbound for a few minutes, looking at the scene of devastation. Then he burst into a loud laugh of triumph.

"Just to think of all the trouble they've been to," he said, "and all for nothing. If they only knew I had that document wouldn't they be waspish? They'd raked me down last night, instead of coming here to play with old lumber."

He grew more inclined than ever to keep the secret of his find. He felt that the men who would take this trouble would not hesitate to capture and torture him if they should dream that he had the mysterious paper.

"It must be mighty valuable," he muttered.

"Guess I'll have to study it a little. It looks as if it was running over full of the law, and law always was a nuisance. I never could get the hang of it."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Lyon. The good lady had come to ask him some further questions about Kate, but she paused and threw up her hands in astonishment on seeing the condition of the room.

"For ever!" she cried. "Well, I declare!"

"Kind of upstettery round here," suggested Hal.

"Who's been here? What's all this?"

"That's what I'd like to know. You didn't hear any noise during the night, Miss Lyon?"

"No. Only a kind of scratching, and some other sounds that I thought were in the next street."

"They've been mighty quiet about it. I wonder if that isn't what they got me out of the way for?"

"But what does it mean? What are they after? Have they stolen anything?"

"I fancy they were after a paper that was said to be hidden somewhere in this room. Some sort of old-time document."

"A paper? Oh, yes! I have heard of that. The hidden will of the Gordon estate."

"The what?" he asked, curiously.

"There! I have said too much. Pat wanted that never spoken of."

"I'd like ever so much to know about it. As long as I'm on this lay it's rather important I should know all the points in the game. What do you mean by the will of the Gordon estate, Miss Lyon?"

"Ask Pat," was her short reply. "He doesn't want it talked about."

Hal bit his lip. He was getting curious about the secret meaning of that paper. What was the use of asking anybody when he had it in his own possession? He could examine it for himself.

"Do you think they have found it?" asked Miss Lyon, anxiously, as she looked about the dismantled room.

"I think they've tried," answered Hal, dryly, as he picked up a hammer. "All I'm sure of is that they've made work for me. It will take me till noon to fit this lumber back into its place."

With little further attention to Miss Lyon he began to select the loose boards and fit them to the places from which they had been torn. It was no easy task, but Hal was a skilled mechanic, and knew a thing or two besides hammering and filing brass and iron.

It was full noon, however, ere he had the wainscoting replaced and nailed fast, the dust and dirt cleared up, and the room brought back to its original state.

"I ought to be obliged to them, I suppose," he remarked, "for finding me in work. But somehow it don't suit Yankee blood to do work that don't pay. Guess I'm even with them, though. I don't believe they got overly well paid for their job."

Hal had worked so hard that morning that he concluded to take it easy for the afternoon. There were no pressing jobs, and he could safely play boss for awhile.

Besides he had something else in view. He had made up his mind to investigate that mysterious document.

The dinner hour over, the worthy 'prentice proceeded to put this resolve into execution.

Seeking his forge, in the rear room, he procured a chisel, and inserted its sharp edge in the crack between two bricks, in the lower part of the forge.

After prying for a minute the brick proved to be loose, and came out, leaving a cavity, into which he thrust his hand.

"Here's a point that their map don't cover," he said, with satisfaction, as he groped with his fingers in the cavity.

After an instant his hand came out, grasping the document, which he had hidden in this safe place.

Hal replaced the brick, and returned to the salesroom with his prize.

Here he arranged a chair behind the counter, and seated himself with his heels on a workbench, and the chair tilted well back.

"Might as well take things comfortable," he said, with an air of satisfaction. "If I'm to set up for boss I don't want none of your half-cut styles. Whole hog or none, that's my motto.—Now let's see what's the gist of this document."

A moment's inspection showed him that the article he held was written on parchment. It was yellow with age, and bore the appearance of having been laid away for many years.

It opened with a crinkling sound, as if stiff at the joints with age. Yet none of its folds were broken. It proved to be partly written and partly printed, the printing yet fresh, the ink pale and discolored, yet nowhere faded out.

A huge seal in red wax, with an official stamp, marked the lower part of the document. Hal gazed at it with a sort of reverence. It seemed to him as if the dignity of all the past lay before him.

"They weren't no slouches, them old-timers," he said. "Ain't no humbug about this. But it makes me feel as if a ghost was looking over my shoulder. I suppose the chap that wrote it has

been playing angel these last fifty years. The whole thing smells kind of graveyardy."

He tilted his chair back an inch further, lifted the ancient document to the level of his eyes, and proceeded to peruse it with an air of great wisdom and importance.

He put on rather too many airs, in fact, for his education was not a very superior one, and it was not long before he found himself floundering hopelessly in a bog of law terms that he could make no more of than so much Chinese or Choctaw.

"It's confounded hard reading," said Hal, scratching his head desperately. "I don't back down before no plain English, but I never set up to cipher out Greek. Anyhow there's one thing sure. Here's the date, 1725. Bless my eyes, if the thing wasn't writ a good hundred years ago! And the chap that wrote it was named George Gordon, for he's flung it out here with a whole penful of ink. But what's it all about? That's the question."

It did not need Miss Lyon's words to teach him that it was a will. That was evident. George Gordon had left a property in real estate, lying in and near the city of Philadelphia. But there was no hint of the value of that estate. It might be worth anything from a dollar to a million for all that Hal could discover.

Studying it more intently he was able to make out some further interesting points. The will seemed to be a curious one. The estate was placed in the hands of executors, and they or successors appointed by them were to hold it for one hundred years. At the end of that time it was to be handed over to the descendants of certain parties named in the will. These parties were Herbert Newton and John Price, nephews of the deceased.

Having made out that much, Hal lay back in his chair, and fell into a deep fit of thought.

"This is what I call a rum go," he cried at length, as a result of his musings. "What a confounded jackass old Gordon must have been, anyhow! And how his nephews must have blessed him! He was killing kind to somebody that was a hundred years off of being born, and that didn't know what a great big gold spoon he was to be born to."

After settling all this in his mind, Hal turned his attention again to his document. There was another mystery he wanted to make out. How came the will to be hidden in the place he had found it?

This he soon discovered. It contained the queer provision that after it had been proved in court it should be laid away in some secure place by the executors, and a map of, or guide to the place where it was concealed should be handed down to future executors. But it was not to be disturbed until the end of the century.

The object of this provision was to prevent any danger of loss or misuse in the hands of any of the executors.

Hal deliberately folded up the paper and returned it to his pocket. Then he drew his hat low down on his forehead. Then he tilted back his chair till it was on the point of overturning. Then he gave vent to a shrill whistle.

"I said it was a rum go," he ejaculated. "I'm blest if that half expresses it. All I've got to say is that that George Gordon had a snarl in his brain that it would take ten lawyers and six doctors to straighten out. He had his intellect tied up in a hard knot; and he's got mine into near as ugly a snarl as his own."

If Hal didn't know much about law, he was not wanting in commonsense and common judgment, and he began to see through some things that had puzzled him more than a little.

It became plain to him that the mystery of the will was at the bottom of the strange things which had lately happened. The various measures taken to get Pat Lyon and his apprentice out of the way, and the searches that had taken place, together with the diagram he had taken from Jerry Bounce and had lost again, all could have but one meaning.

Some one who had an interest in the estate was trying to get hold of and destroy the hidden will.

But this party, whoever he was, was keeping well in the background, and working through agents. It was not his game to put in an appearance.

Who was he? He must be rich, to command so many agents, and to have at his command the several houses which Hal had investigated. Was it Mr. Judkin? He thought so. But he might be mistaken. It was not safe to come to an opinion too quickly.

But one thing he was sure of. The hidden villain was one of the executors. He had some plan to get possession of the property himself. Who were the other executors? And what had Pat Lyon and May Clifford to do with the affair, that such efforts should be made to get rid of them?

"I bet a cow they are the heirs," ejaculated Hal. "It ain't no baby play that's going on. If we hadn't let Miss Clifford out of that house, she'd never come out alive. That's my notion. And to think that she didn't have no better wit than to run away from me in the street! She don't know which side her bread's buttered, that's sure. And as for Pat Lyon, they calcu-

late to get rid of him by a good ten years in prison. Then they'll swoop down on the property and dig out. It's a mighty neat little game as it stands, but they've stirred up the wrong nest. Didn't calculate there were hornets around, I reckon."

He brought his chair to the floor, got up, and stretched himself, with a sense of muscle and brain that made him feel like snapping his fingers at the conspirators.

"I'm only a youngster yet," he declared, "and ain't got my eye-teeth all cut, but I reckon they'll find before they're done with me that a Philadelphia 'prentice ain't to be sneezed at. A chap can pick up some points filing iron as well as reading law papers."

The entrance of a customer brought Hal's reflections to an end at this point. For the rest of the day he was kept busy.

That evening after supper he told Miss Lyon that he had decided to spend the night in the salesroom.

"They might come smelling round again," he said. "It's a shame not to have somebody to receive such noble visitors."

It was a mistaken idea. There was not one chance in a million that they would return. But Hal thought it safest to speculate on that one chance.

Yet the hours passed quietly by without a sign. Ten o'clock struck. Then eleven sounded from a neighboring clock tower.

Hal turned with a yawn from the book he had been reading. He was growing sleepy. The street was as quiet as death. Everybody seemed to have been hours in bed.

Suddenly there came to his ears the sound of voices and hasty steps.

Then there rose a cry of indignation in a woman's voice. The disturbance seemed just in front of the house.

Hal sprang up, seized a hammer, and ran to the door. His aid might be needed.

At that instant there came a loud knocking on the door, and a cry, in a woman's voice that seemed familiar to him.

"Help! Help! Save me! Save me!"

Without a moment's hesitation he unlocked the door and flung it open. A woman rushed impulsively in and clung wildly to him.

"Save me! Save me!" she screamed, in terror.

The gallant 'prentice had caught one hasty glimpse of her face. It was enough. There were the well-known features of May Clifford.

Clasping her with one arm, he raised the hammer with the other, and faced the men who were in pursuit of the fair fugitive.

"Another step, on your lives!" he sternly cried. "I'll brain the first man that tries to enter!"

CHAPTER XVII.

A HARD BATTLE.

THERE were four or five men in the group that pushed forward, in pursuit of the flying maiden.

They were burly, evil-faced fellows, who pressed on Hal with oaths and threats, despite his determined attitude.

"Hand over that gal!" cried the leader, fiercely. "We don't want to hurt you, but we'll make it sorry for you if you don't."

"Don't let them take me!" cried May, in terror, clinging to Hal, desperately.

"Never, while I live," he returned. "Back, you hounds, or there'll be some dead men to answer for."

"On him, lads! He's only one to five. Go for him!"

They made a rush forward. Hal's hammer swung lightly in the air and fell with a sharp crack on the skull of the nearest assailant.

The man toppled back and tumbled headlong from the step.

Taking advantage of the moment's confusion which this made Hal sprang back, pushed the door hastily to, and tried to turn the key.

But the shrewd leader of the party was too quick for him. He had hastily thrust into the opening the end of a club which he bore. It was impossible to close it.

And now came a struggle of strengths. The assailants pushed on one side, Hal on the other. He could not have resisted them for a moment but that he had a brace for his feet in a raised part of the floor.

"Put your strength to the door," he said to the fair fugitive. "Every pound counts now."

She instantly obeyed him. Her terror was passing away. Weak as she was her force added to that of the 'prentice, whose strength was gradually giving way.

"I wish I had Pat Lyon here," muttered Hal, between his teeth.

At that moment Miss Lyon came rushing in. She had been disturbed by the uproar in the street. Just behind her appeared the slender form of Kate.

Without stopping to explain Hal called to them to add their strength to the door.

"There'll be the Old Nick to pay if they get in," he cried.

This reinforcement aided immensely. The quick jerk given the door nearly closed it. But

for that club which still held it open the lock might have been sprung.

But this triumph lasted but a minute. Three women and one youth were no match for four men, even with an advantage of purchase. The door began to slowly open again.

The oaths of the baffled villains came furiously through the crack. Miss Lyon, who was an adept in the art of screaming, answered them with a volley of screams that might have been heard three squares off.

It brought an unexpected response. There came a peculiar whistle, that seemed like a signal.

Hal lifted his ears. The sound seemed to convey a meaning to him. In an instant he answered, with a shrill whistle that surpassed Miss Lyon's scream.

"Hold hard, now!" he cried. "It's some of the 'prentices! There's help coming."

The signal was repeated, and again answered. The beleaguered party clung firmly to their post.

But at that moment there came an unexpected diversion. A crash sounded from the rear, as if a door had been burst in. Steps were heard on the floor of the workshop.

With a cry of terror Kate ran back from the door. Miss Lyon also fell half over against the wall, faint with fear. Only Hal and Miss Clifford held on.

A strong shove from without and the door was thrust open. Miss Clifford was driven into the corner behind it. Hal was sent staggering back, but managed to keep his feet.

Three men rushed in. And at the same moment two others rushed from the workshop into the salesroom. The assailants had divided their forces and attacked the defenders front and rear.

Yet aid was at hand. The signal whistle came again, this time close by.

Hal answered it, and sung out cheerily:

"Prentices to the rescue! Up, lads, up! Hereaway, my lively boys! Hereaway!"

He sprang forward with the fury of a lion, and seized a man who had just caught Miss Clifford by the arm.

A hoarse cry from his tense lips, a fierce surge, and the man's head cracked against the wall as if it had been a cocoanut.

He flung the fellow from him and turned to face his other opponents. At that moment the leader of the party had dealt a savage blow at him with his club. Only by a sudden stoop did Hal escape it.

Ere he could recover he was struck a hard blow by the fist of the other, and sent headlong back on the hard floor.

All this had been the work of seconds.

Yet, ere the villains could follow up their advantage, there came a cheering answer to Hal's cry:

"Prentices! Prentices! At 'em, lads! At 'em! Rattle 'em! Rattle 'em!"

There was a patter of feet, and then a group of youthful forms sprang into the open doorway.

On seeing Hal prostrate, and the leader of the ruffians striding over him with uplifted club, several of the youngsters darted forward like cats, seizing the assailant by arm, leg, and shoulder.

At this moment there came a scream from the voice of Kate, who had fled into the salesroom.

"Help! Help! They are carrying me off! Help! Oh, help!"

Several of the 'prentices rushed on, to the locality of this cry. The others continued their assault on Hal's foes.

He, on his side, took instant advantage of the diversion to scramble to his feet. He looked around him. The two men had their hands full with a spiteful half-dozen of 'prentices. The man he had felled was crawling to his feet again, with his eyes fixed savagely on Miss Clifford, who was backed against the wall, looking almost like a bird that is charmed by a snake.

"Prentices! Prentices!" shouted Hal, with the clear ring of a war-cry.

He sprang forward with the lightness of a leopard, and with one fierce blow sent the ruffian reeling out over the doorstep.

Then seizing Miss Clifford in his muscular arms, he bore her back as if she was a feather, and thrust her through an open door leading to the house—that by which Miss Lyon and Kate had entered.

"Stay there!" he said, in a voice of mingled command and tenderness. "We will settle those fellows in a jiffy."

As he rushed back to the fray sounds of combat came from the adjoining room. He ran in to see if he was needed there.

Kate, who had fled in affright on the giving way of the door, had run headlong into this room, and directly into the clutch of the two fellows who had broken in from the rear.

"Here's luck!" cried one of them. "It's that runaway witch of a Kate. Snap her, Jake, She's worth a cool hundred!"

The screams that had been heard from Kate were a consequence of her capture by these men.

They instantly began to drag her away, seeking to stifle her cries as they did so.

Yet ere they got her out of the room a group of the 'prentices were on them.

The villains were forced to release their captive and defend themselves against this assault.

When Hal entered it was to see Kate crouching in mortal fear in a corner, while of the assailing 'prentices two were stretched on the floor, and the remaining two were being forced back by their burly opponents.

Hal's appearance changed the aspect of the fray. Seizing a stool he hurled it with all his strength at the head of a black-whiskered and stern-faced fellow, who was the most eager in the assault.

The missile took him in the forehead, and stretched him on the floor.

His companion, on seeing the fate of his friend, instantly turned and fled, as if stricken with a panic.

The noise of conflict in the hall had now declined, and seemed to have passed out into the street, as if the 'prentices were gaining the victory.

The fellow whom Hal had felled seemed to recognize defeat, as he scrambled to his feet, and stood for an instant in a listening and defensive attitude.

Then he snatched an iron tool from the counter and flung it at Hal's head.

The agile youth avoided it by a quick stoop. But the villain was gone. He had turned and fled on the instant.

The 'prentices followed. Hal turned to Kate. "That was one of them," she said, in a tone of terror.

"Ha! One of the men of that house?"

"Yes! yes!"

"That's something to know, anyhow. Now for the finish."

He rushed back into the hall. But there was nobody there but Miss Lyon. The combat was going on outside.

Hal hurried forward to the street.

There he found the man he had felled on his feet again, and hurrying away, as if he had enough of that sport.

The other two were still defending themselves against the 'prentices, who outnumbered them two to one.

On seeing Hal they appeared to recognize that the game was up. With an oath of revenge and disappointment they fled. The battle was over and the 'prentices held the field.

At that point up came a night-watchman, blustering and important.

"What's all this row about, hey? Who's fighting here? You rascals, it's you, is it? I'll settle you!"

He laid a hand on the shoulders of two of the 'prentices.

"Just you drop that," cried Hal, angrily, "or I'll settle you. Here you come in after the fight's all over, and the rascals have got away. Slip your fingers off them lads' shoulders or I'll make things hot for you. And I mean every word of it."

The doughty watchman saw that he had made a mistake. He saw also that he was outnumbered, and that prudence was a wise virtue.

"Hey! what?" he cried. "Made off, have they, the rascals? This way? I'll have them."

Away he went, springing his rattle valiantly. Hal laughed at his easy triumph.

"Sweet set, they are," he declared. "Tell you what, boys, you come in good time. Things were getting hot, and no mistake. Didn't we give them jolly peppers, eh?"

"You bet we did!" chimed in the 'prentices.

After ten minutes of self-glorification Hal got rid of his useful friends, and reentered the house, eager to discover the condition of things inside. He was particularly interested in the welfare of Miss May Clifford.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PARLEY AFTER THE COMBAT.

THE battle recorded in the last chapter, long as it has taken to describe it, had lasted less than five minutes. Time moves slowly in cases of mortal combat. Many incidents can be compressed into a minute of time.

It was all over so quickly that the neighbors had hardly time to take the alarm. As the 'prentices turned to retire many windows were opening, and heads thrust out, with anxious questions.

Leaving his young friends to answer, Hal entered the house, and closed and locked the door. He then hurried to the workshop, and locked the door that had been forced open there. The villains might return with reinforcements. It was best to be on the safe side.

Then he returned to the room in which he had left Miss Clifford. He found her seated, in a listless and depressed attitude, as if utterly overcome by her misfortunes.

He staggered himself on entering the room. The reaction from his late exertions had come upon him, and he dropped into a chair, as listlessly as if he had not a nerve or muscle left in his body.

Instantly Miss Clifford was up and at his side, and had wound her soft arms round his head.

"My protector! My preserver!" she cried, impulsively. "You are not hurt? Oh! if you are injured I shall never forgive myself!"

"You couldn't help it," murmured Hal, in a weakly tone. The rogue rather enjoyed the situation.

"But are you hurt? Those terrible men! Oh, say you are not hurt!"

"Only generally used up," answered Hal. "I'll be all right again in five minutes. It was kind of short and sharp, and hard on a fellow's wind."

With a blush at her impulsive tenderness Miss Clifford released him, and retired toward her chair. But before reaching it she again sprang forward, crying out in despairing accents:

"But where am I? What shall I do? I have been betrayed! I am surrounded by traitors! First, my coachman; and now my maid! Oh, what shall I do?"

"Who are those men?" asked Miss Lyon, who had just entered the room. "Why do they pursue you?"

"I don't know. Indeed I don't know." The poor girl sunk nervelessly back into her chair. "Ever since I have been in this city I have been pursued by a band of villains. What they want I know not. This is the third time they have attacked me. And every time I have been rescued by this brave, generous, noble young gentleman."

She half-rose again, as if with an impulse to display her gratitude in a warmer manner.

"Oh, drop that!" cried Hal. "I wouldn't be much of a fellow if I let them chaps carry you off. But ain't you a bit careless, Miss Clifford, to be traveling the streets alone at this time of night, when you know that you are in danger?"

"I was lured out by base treachery," she replied. "I received word through my maid that my old nurse was dying, and that I must go at once if I would see her alive. I hastened out with her and she led me into an ambush of these ruffians. Then she fled and left me. I don't know what would have been my fate, only fortune made me fly to your door."

Hal and Miss Lyon listened with the greatest interest. It was certainly a strange and exciting story.

"First your coachman and then your maid," cried Hal. "You are surrounded by traitors. Who are these persons? How came you to be surrounded by such people?"

"They were both recommended to me by a friend in whom I have every confidence," answered the poor maiden. "He must have been deceived in them. They have been bought over by my foes."

"Who was this friend?" asked Hal.

"Oh, he is no new acquaintance. I have known him from childhood. I can place every trust in him."

"No doubt. But you can't mind telling me his name?"

"Why, certainly not. It is Mr. Judkin. Mr. Elias Judkin. One of our best known citizens."

"Jupiter!" ejaculated Hal.

This word was echoed by a strange cry from the rear of the room.

They all turned. There stood Kate, looking pale and frightened, with both hands thrust out as if to repel some danger.

"What is the matter?" cried Hal, springing up and approaching her. "Ha! that name! Mr. Judkin! You have heard it before?"

She gave a weak nod in reply.

"He is the other of them? He and the black-whiskered fellow are the pair?"

Her only reply was another nod. She seemed afraid to speak.

"That's a jolly point, anyhow," exclaimed Hal, with great satisfaction.

Miss Clifford had been looking from one to the other with deep surprise.

"I do not understand," she cried, nervously.

"Why do you exclaim so at Mr. Judkin's name?"

"Because, unless I'm a bigger fool than I think I am, he's the king bee of the whole lot of rogues."

"Mr. Judkin! Impossible!"

"Not quite."

"The friend of my childhood! I cannot and will not believe it!"

"But the next time you want a coachman or a maid, don't ask him for a recommendation. That's my advice."

"Oh, what shall I do?" she cried, wringing her hands helplessly. "Enemies around me everywhere! Forced to distrust my oldest friends! Oh, what shall I do?"

"Do you believe I am your friend, Miss Clifford?" asked Hal.

"Yes, yes!" she cried, gazing in his face with a look of winning confidence. "You are noble and generous. I trust you fully."

"I am on your side till the cows come home," cried the gallant 'prentice, with a glance of meaning devotion. "But if I'm to help you, you must help me. You are surrounded with plots. I am trying to work out those plots. But if I am to do anything you must tell me your story, and let me know everything that happens."

"I will! I will! Everything!" she exclaimed.

"In working for you I am working for myself and my own friends. My boss—the man I'm 'prentice to—is in prison, and it's all on account

of this same plot. They're after him as well as you. I know their game, Miss Clifford. It's a big stake. They won't stop at a crime to carry it out. They have laid a deep and intricate scheme."

She stared at him with a half-wild expression. She seemed to be growing more and more alarmed.

"Your boss?—your employer?" she repeated.

"Who is he?"

"Pat Lyon, the locksmith."

A cry of terror came from her lips. She fell back in her chair and pressed her hands over her eyes, as if she would shut out some disturbing phantom.

"What is the matter with you?" cried Miss Lyon, sharply and angrily. "Pat Lyon is my brother. Why do you cry out so?"

"But he is my enemy—the worst of my enemies," faltered the poor girl.

"It is false! The man or woman that told you so lies. There is not an honest or sounder man in America than Pat Lyon, and I can bring five hundred to swear to that. What say you, Hal?"

"I'll stand to that, from daybreak to sunset," he replied. "I don't know where you got that notion, Miss Clifford, but it is a wrong one. It's a part of the plot to make you believe that. Somebody is afraid of Pat Lyon."

She stared helplessly from one to the other of the speakers, with wide-open eyes.

"But he is in prison for bank robbery," she said. "I am told he stole thirty thousand dollars from the Drover's Bank."

"He didn't steal thirty cents," answered Hal. "And we'll prove that very soon."

She continued to look at them in a confused way, as if too completely upset by the events of the past hour to have the power to think.

"I want to go home," she feebly said.

"You had best stay here to-night," answered Miss Lyon. "It is too late for you to be in the street."

"They will be worried about me," she replied, in unsteady tones.

"Never mind that, Miss Clifford. Tell me where you live and I will go and report. It is not safe for you to go out again to-night."

"But you?" she cried, fearfully. "They may attack you?"

"Let them," he said, with a laugh. "I bet they get enough of it. I won't trust to my fists though. I'll take something along that will teach them a lesson. Give me your direction, Miss Clifford, and I will go at once."

She did so, much to Hal's satisfaction. He felt that he had gained a point in that. In addition she wrote a short note to her friends.

He turned to go, but quickly stopped.

"There is one thing I forgot," he said. "Mr. Judkin is not very lucky in choosing servants for you. Let me choose you a maid, in place of the one who betrayed you."

"I should be very glad," she replied.

"Then here she is," he rejoined, pointing to Kate, whose face suddenly lightened up. "Honest and trustworthy, you can take my word for that. They will not find it easy to buy her. What say you, Kate? Would you like to engage with Miss Clifford?"

"Oh, ever so much," cried Kate, eagerly. "I like her. I hope she'll take me."

The young lady turned and looked at Kate long and searchingly. She seemed trying to read her character in her face.

"I'll take her," she simply said, turning to Hal.

"You couldn't do better," he replied.

"Oh, miss, I'll serve you faithfully," exclaimed Kate, clasping her hands in delight. "I'm only a poor girl, without a home or a friend, and I'm eternally obliged to you."

"Are you not at home here, and among friends?" asked Miss Clifford, doubtfully.

"Oh, they've been ever so kind. But I've no claim on them. They don't know much about me. I'm only here on charity."

Miss Clifford looked at Hal questioningly.

"Kate is all right," he remarked. "She has a story, Miss Clifford. It is part of the story I want to tell you, for it is mixed up with your own. But not to-night. Will you not take her now on my recommendation?"

"Yes. Certainly."

"You will not regret it."

"I'll try and serve you faithfully," murmured poor Kate.

"And now good-night. I'll be back in half an hour. Try to get sleep, if you can, after your excitement. There's nothing like sleep to cure trouble."

Leaving them the light-hearted 'prentice stepped into the workshop, provided himself with a weapon against possible danger, and left the house, locking the door behind him.

The distance he had to go was not very great. A smile came to his lips as he neared the spot to which he was directed.

He perceived that it was several squares away from the point at which Miss Clifford had given him the slip on a former occasion.

"She's a cute one, if she does trust in rascals," he said at length, as he mounted the steps of the handsome mansion that answered to the directions given him.

A sharp peal at the bell brought an anxious-looking woman to the door.

"I am from Miss Clifford," announced Hal, to her surprised look.

"I have been waiting up for her. Is she still with her sick nurse?"

"This will explain," he replied, handing her the note which Miss Clifford had hastily penciled. "She is safe and comfortable, but will not be home till morning."

He turned away without further words, leaving the note to explain.

In fact, he was a little nervous at the thought that he had left only women in the house. What if the villains should return in his absence?

Spurred on by this dread he hastened home at a run. But all was quiet when he entered the house.

"Asleep already," he muttered, as he quietly closed the door. "I didn't calculate they'd drop off that soon."

He was mistaken; there was not a closed eye in the house, and every ear was listening eagerly for his return.

Hal entered the salesroom, where he had made up his mind to spend the night. However it was with the rest, in half an hour he was as sound asleep as an oak log.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAL HAS A BRACE OF INTERVIEWS.

WE must move on rather rapidly through the events of our story, leaving many of the minor details to the reader's imagination.

Only the main events need to be told in the story of life. The minor ones can be guessed.

We may say, then, briefly, that Miss Clifford returned to her home the next morning in company with her new maid.

Hal wanted to accompany her for protection, but she would not listen to any need of protection by daylight.

He did not insist. He knew very well that he was thinking more of his own pleasure than of any danger to her.

And he had something of more importance to attend to than the task of gallanting pretty girls through the streets.

He wanted, for one thing, to see Alderman Jones, and report to him the recent events. The affair was growing heavy for a young head, and older advice was needed.

He found the worthy magistrate in his office and disengaged. Seating himself, Hal proceeded to relate to him the recent occurrences.

The alderman listened to him intently, his face wrinkling with interest. He continued to look at Hal for some time after he had finished.

"Well," he broke out at length, in his queer manner. "If you get yourself killed, remember that I can't do any more than have an inquest held over what's left of you."

"But I'm not half killed," answered Hal.

"I tell you what, young man, you're piling up history fast. So you've found the girl again, eh?"

"And the man, too. What do you think about old Judkin, alderman?"

"He's deep," answered the alderman, nodding his head wisely. "Deep as a well. But I never knew a well so deep yet that you couldn't get to its bottom with a bucket."

"Then you believe with me, that he's the prime mover in this affair?"

"Believe, boy? I never believe anything. Don't you know that as soon as a man believes he shuts his eyes? What I know, I know. But I never stop at the half-way house of belief."

Hal looked at him queerly.

"Who robbed the bank?" he asked.

"The man that stole the lost key."

"And that hid those papers in Pat Lyon's garden?"

"Oh, no. That was only one of his agents. If I could only get hold of that fellow the whole case would be clear. But he has given us the slip. He is not in the city."

"He might refuse to speak if you should catch him."

"Refuse? Why, he has played the traitor to his employer already. I'll tell you a thing or two, boy. This fellow was given those papers to bury. Instead of doing so he copied them and buried the copies. He kept the originals to squeeze his employers. That chap could be easily made to speak if we had him. But he has been paid and shipped off."

"There's the boy, Toby. He seems to know all about the business."

Alderman Jones shook his head.

"He knows nothing about it. The man that's working this isn't fool enough to trust a boy. He's only been used as a go-between."

"At any rate the thing looks black for Judkin."

"There are wheels within wheels, my boy. Making up your mind too quick is the worst thing you can do. Wait and watch."

"Then you believe—"

"I don't believe anything."

Hal paused, nonplused. There was no getting an opinion out of Alderman Jones.

"When will Mr. Lyon's trial come up?" he asked at length.

"Next Monday. That reminds me. He wants to see you. Here is an order of admission to the prison."

He quickly penned an order and handed it to Hal.

"You had best go down as soon as you can."

"All right. I will. Now about that other business, alderman. What shall I do next?"

"Get the 'prentices to watch out for that rascal, Jerry. If they find him, snatch him and bring him here."

"Anything else?"

"Find out all you can from Miss Clifford. She may be able to give you the cue to the whole business."

"How about the black-whiskered man I told you of?"

"I have detectives already on the watch of the two suspected houses. Anybody coming and going to them will be closely shadowed."

Hal looked at the official with admiration. Alderman Jones seemed to have forgotten nothing.

"What do you think of the case?" he asked.

"I think that some gentlemen are walking Philadelphia streets with ropes round their necks. Invisible ropes. They don't feel them yet. But just wait till we're ready to pull."

"But there's something deeper than any common bank robbery in this?"

"If there wasn't I'd leave it all to the courts. Common things don't suit me. There, slide now. I've got business."

Two hours afterward Hal entered Pat Lyon's cell, under the aid of the order of Alderman Jones.

He found the worthy locksmith out of temper and spirits, and fallen away somewhat in flesh. The close confinement of a prison cell did not suit his constitution.

"Just wait till I get out of this. See if I don't sweat that bank," he cried.

"They have no case against you. They can't convict you," remarked Hal.

"I know that. My lawyer says it's a sure thing in my favor. But that's not what I want to talk about."

He proceeded to give Hal a series of directions about business matters.

"I expect to be back myself in a week," he said, more cheerfully. "I can trust you to keep things going, Hal."

"It's odd papers if you can't. But never mind that. There's something else I want to talk about."

"What is it?"

"The Gordon will," answered Hal, looking keenly at the locksmith.

The latter winced and looked annoyed.

"Who told you anything about that? What do you know about it?"

"More than you think. But not enough. I know all about the queer terms of the will. I know that the property has increased in value until it is worth a million of dollars. I haven't been asleep, you see. I know more than that. I know the heirs."

"The deuce you do!" cried Pat, curtly and sharply, as he turned his keen eyes on the apprentice.

"I can name them to you if you wish."

"I certainly do wish."

"One of them is Miss May Clifford, a young lady who has just appeared in Philadelphia, and whom a band of rascals is trying to put out of the way."

"May Clifford?" repeated Pat, with a look of surprise. "What do you know about her?"

"Do you want first to hear the name of the other heir?"

"I certainly do. I'd give something to know it. What is the name?"

"Pat Lyon, the locksmith," cried Hal, looking at his employer with an air of triumph.

The worthy locksmith took a step back, stared with an amazed aspect, uttered a queer exclamation, and then broke out into a fit of laughter that threw Hal into utter confusion.

"Well, well, if the boy hasn't found a goldmine in a gravel-bank! Much obliged, Hal, but I'm afraid I won't handle my share of that million. If all your facts are of that sort they won't sell for much in the market."

"You deny that you are the heir, then?"

"Most decidedly. I only wish I was."

"Then what are you?"

"Pat Lyon, locksmith."

"But you have something to do with it. You admit that a mysterious paper is concealed in your house. You acknowledge that there is a secret connected with it. And you are tricked and put in prison. What for?"

"For robbing the bank," answered Pat, with a smile.

"To be got out of the way, I take it. This bank robbery is only part of the plot. They are trying to get rid of you and Miss Clifford."

"I fancy they won't get rid of me very easily. I may give them some trouble yet."

"That's not all," continued Hal. "You remember the time those two young rascals tried to discover a hidden paper in your salesroom?"

"Which they didn't find, thanks to you."

"You looked for it afterward, and failed to find it?"

"Perhaps I did," smiled the locksmith.

"Well, that game's been tried over again, and more in earnest. They nabbed me, and locked me up in a tight room, and then took the opportunity to make a complete search of the room. Every inch of woodwork was torn from the walls. It was a perfect scene of ruin when I came back."

Pat Lyon seemed more disturbed by this information than by anything that Hal had yet said.

He frowned, grew flushed, and gave vent to certain hasty exclamations.

"Has he beaten me?" he cried, in a low tone, as if forgetting Hal's presence. "And not two months to the time. What's to be done now? He has the plan. He must have found the paper."

"I guess not," remarked Hal, with a significant look.

"You guess not? Why?" Pat looked hastily up.

"It is hard to get something out of nothing."

"You are talking in riddles, boy."

"Anyhow they didn't get the paper."

"Why?"

"Because it wasn't there."

"Not there? Where was it then?"

"In the snug little corner where I had hidden it."

Pat was on his feet now, and standing eagerly before his apprentice.

"Speak out, you rascal. You found the paper? When? Where?"

"Behind the boards that Jerry Bounce tore loose."

"Good for you!" He struck Hal a blow of satisfaction on the shoulder. "You hid it again? Where is it?"

"Here."

Hal produced the important document from his pocket, where he had carried it since the occasion of his reading it.

Pat snatched it eagerly from his hand, hastily unfolded it, and began to read it with an intentness that quite ignored the presence of a second person.

For twenty minutes he sat perusing and studying, without the slightest notice of his curious apprentice.

At the end of that time he looked up with an air of great satisfaction.

"You have done a good job, my lad. A better job than you think for. That's all I can say to-day. Let me keep this. It's safest in my hands. You are getting into too many scrapes to carry anything so valuable as this about you."

Hal looked at him in a maze.

"If you are not one of the heirs, who is the other one?" he asked, impulsively.

"That's what I'd like to know. I must see your Miss Clifford as soon as I get out of this."

"I hope to see her to-morrow," said Hal, in a tone that took the locksmith's attention.

He looked at Hal with a growing smile on his face.

"You are interested in Miss Clifford?" he remarked.

"Not much," cried Hal, hastily, with an effort to look unconcerned, in which he signally failed.

"Not much, eh? Pretty, is she?"

"Oh, yes, rather."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. And you think she is one of the heirs of the Gordon estate. Now, what makes you think that? Sit down, Hal, and tell me the whole story. I can see that something has been going on since I've been here. I want to know what. It may be more important to me than to you."

"It's a good deal of a puzzler to me," admitted Hal.

He proceeded to repeat the story of his adventures, from the period in which the bank messenger came to the locksmith's shop to the time of his present visit.

Pat listened heedfully, with a strange look occasionally crossing his face.

He started as if in surprise on learning of Miss Clifford's mistrust of himself and of her naming Mr. Judkin as her confidential adviser.

"It is working richly," was his remark at the conclusion. "I should not wonder if you were right, and that Miss Clifford was one of the heirs."

"And Judkin one of the executors," suggested Hal. "He's trying to get rid of the heirs and the papers and records, so as he can snatch the estate himself. The thing is clear."

"Don't think you can see through all that looks clear. You might cheat yourself."

"Then Judkin is not an executor?"

"What do I know about it?"

"A good deal more than you are willing to tell," retorted Hal.

Pat laughed in great amusement.

"See here, Hal, there's one way of settling this. If Miss Clifford is an heir to the estate she can answer a certain question which I want you to ask her."

"What is that, sir?"

"Ask her if she has not in her possession the family record of the Newtons. If she has get it from her and hide it somewhere. It is not safe in her hands."

"Why?"

"It is that these rascals are after. They want to force her to hand over that record. That and this will would be worth to them a million dollars."

"Ah!" cried Hal, with a sudden opening of his eyes.

Soon after he left the cell. He had learned a thing or two since entering it.

CHAPTER XX.

A TALE OF A LIFE OF MYSTERY.

THE mansion in which May Clifford had taken up her residence was a large and fine one in the then fashionable part of the city, a region which is now given up to the wholesale business houses, but was then occupied by the blue blood of Philadelphia.

She was residing with a cousin of hers, privately. She had reasons of her own for not wishing it to be generally known that she was in the city.

Yet, as we have seen, she employed her own servants. The young lady was not without means, and desired to be independent.

One main reason of her desire for secrecy was her dread of two persons, Miss Perkins and Pat Lyon, whom she had always been taught to believe were her deadly enemies.

She had been advised by her old friend, Mr. Judkin, to come to the city.

But he had also instructed her to do so secretly, warning her that it might prove dangerous if her visit was known to her enemies.

All this she had told to Hal Prince on his visit to her on an evening shortly after the occurrences just related.

Hal was got up in his best attire, and was a very handsome fellow, as he sat in an easy-chair, in the handsomely-furnished parlor of Mrs. Wells, May's cousin.

Opposite him sat May, looking prettier than ever, and with an expression on her face of complete trust and confidence in the handsome 'prentice.

Hal had managed to get on the right side of his fair friend. There was no danger of her running away from him again.

"You have told me a few things, Miss Clifford," he said, quietly. "But it isn't half nor quarter of what I want to know. Do you know that you are a regular riddle, and that I'm completely used-up trying to guess your meaning?"

"Am I?" she asked.

"You are. I give up the conundrum. I want you to tell me the answer."

"Mercy, Mr. Prince. I know no more about it than you do yourself."

"What!" he cried. "Do you mean to say that you don't know why these villains are trying to carry you off, or what sort of a game your enemies are playing?"

"I know nothing about it. I know that my life is surrounded by mystery. But I have never been able to see through that mystery. It is as dark to me as midnight."

He looked at her in surprise.

"Well!" he broke out. "So your dear friends have been keeping you in the dark? That was very kind of them. Did Mr. Judkin tell you nothing?"

"He always said it was best I should not know yet. It would double my danger if I knew the whole. And he was not at liberty to speak until a certain time, he declared. Then he would tell me all."

Hal's look grew quizzical.

"Do you know that you are a very innocent young lady?" he asked.

"I never pretend to any great wisdom."

"And Mr. Judkin is a very tender-hearted old gentleman. It is lucky I am at liberty to speak. I am not afraid of hurting you by letting a little bit of the cat out of the bag."

May's eyes had grown large and eager as he spoke.

"Oh, then you know! You can tell me!" she exclaimed, starting impulsively to her feet. "Oh, speak out, Mr. Prince! I am dying to learn this secret."

"I only know a little bit of it," he answered. "You have got to tell me all about yourself before I can see through it."

"I will tell you all I know. Only speak out."

She had advanced to the table, and was resting on it with her hands, looking him eagerly in the eyes.

"And it is only guess-work on my part. Perhaps I had better hear your story first. I don't want to raise false expectations."

She sprang forward with a look of utter vexation, seized him by the shoulders with her two small hands, and gave him a little shake.

"There!" she cried. "Will you speak? You don't know what you'll tempt me to do after awhile."

"I'd like to keep on tempting you," smiled the rogue, gazing with warm admiration into the pretty flushed face.

She released him with a slight blush.

"Won't you tell me, Mr. Prince?" she asked, in a pleading tone.

"I'd be cruel if I didn't, after that."

"Then tell me. Now!"

Her little foot struck imperiously on the floor.

"Are you wealthy, Miss Clifford?"

"Why do you ask? I have some money."

"Suppose I should tell you that you are one of the heirs to a very large estate, and that your share will not be less than half a million?"

Her eyes opened wider yet as he spoke. A shade of paleness marked her face. She staggered a step back, and laid her hand on the table for support.

"You are mocking me."

"I am in solid earnest. But mind, I am not sure of this. It is partly a guess on my part."

She turned again with another revulsion of feeling, drew up her chair until it nearly touched his, and seated herself squarely facing him, with a look of determination on her changeable face.

"Tell me all about it," she commanded.

"No, I won't," he answered. "Not one word more till I know if I'm on the right or the wrong road. I must know the story of your life first. There are some clues I want, and that may give them."

She frowned slightly. It was evident the young lady had been used to having her own way. But Hal looked so coolly resolute that she quickly saw there was no moving him.

"Well, if I must, I must," she declared.

"But you are a provoking fellow."

"I am sorry, Miss Clifford. But I'm afraid I was born that way."

"There now, keep quiet. I see there is no doing anything with you."

"Excuse me, but I'm the easiest fellow to manage in the whole United States. All that anybody has to do is to let me have my own way and we get along swimmingly."

May flashed her blue eyes at him, and then burst into a merry fit of laughter.

"You are a sad rogue," she declared, shaking her finger warningly. "But keep right still now. I'll tell you all. It is fortunate that I have not much to tell. You only want the important points?"

"I am sure I will be glad to hear all that Miss May Clifford has to tell," said Hal, settling himself, easily in his chair, and looking admiringly into the pretty and excited face so near him.

Her color grew a little deeper, and she broke rather hastily into her story.

"You will not hear much," she declared. "In the first place, I was born in Philadelphia. My father and mother both died when I was young, and I was left in the care of my aunt, Miss Perkins. I was then only about six years old. I lived ten years with my aunt. I cannot say that they were quite happy or quite miserable years. Miss Perkins was of a hard temper, and I was somewhat headstrong. Likely there was fault on both sides."

"When did you first know Mr. Judkin?"

"There! You will keep persecuting poor Mr. Judkin! Why, I have known him since I knew anybody. He was a friend of my father. Before he died he told me that I should be guided by the advice of Mr. Judkin. He said that there was a mystery in my life that I would not learn till I was twenty years of age, and that Mr. Judkin would be my friend and counsel. I don't believe my father was deceived."

"Honest men sometimes lose their honesty under the force of a great temptation," said Hal. "Judkin hasn't stood the pressure. How old are you now, Miss Clifford?"

"Almost twenty."

"Then you are almost old enough for the secret. But you say that Pat Lyon is one of your enemies. What has he done to you?"

"I don't know. I never saw him."

"Then what makes you say such a thing?"

"Wait. I have not come to that yet. I have only got to my sixteenth year. At that age there came a change in my life. My aunt began to act very strangely to me. I could not tell whether it was tenderness, or pity, or what it was, but her manner greatly changed. Just when I was sixteen years old she told me that she had to go far West on a matter of business, and that I must go with her. She said she was afraid to leave me behind; that some danger threatened me. I didn't trouble myself much about that. I was fond of adventure, and was glad of the chance for a change of scene. We set out suddenly and somewhat secretly. I did not even see Mr. Judkin before going. My aunt insisted that our journey must be kept secret, and I did not oppose her."

"That was very strange."

"Wasn't it? She had her object. I have never yet found out what. Except that she wanted me out of the way for reasons of her own. Well, we went. It was a long journey. All the way to the center of Ohio. And all by stage-coach, and wagon, and canal, and horseback. But I enjoyed it all. Well, we reached at length a small Ohio town, where Miss Perkins had friends living. I then found out her business. Part of it, at least. It seemed my father had owned land out there. My aunt wanted to sell that and put the money where it would bring more interest."

"You don't find fault with that?"

"Don't interrupt me," she cried, with affected peevishness. "Well, she came back after three months. But she left me there. She gave good reasons for it. Some danger threatened me. I

must keep out of sight till I was past twenty. I did not trouble much about that. I liked the town, and the people, and readily consented to stay. My aunt's friends were very agreeable people."

"Did Mr. Judkin know where you were?"

"No. My aunt strictly warned me not to write to anybody in Philadelphia except herself. For three years I obeyed her. I was perfectly content. Then I began to get tired of Ohio life and longed to come back to the city. I wrote requesting her to let me come, and received a severe answer, saying that the interests involved in my stay were too great to be imperiled by a girlish whim. I must stay where I was for at least a year more. That letter made me angry, Mr. Prince. I thought I was being treated too much like a child, and that a fairy story of a mystery was got up to keep me quiet. I began to distrust my aunt, and to think that she had some reason of her own for keeping me out of the way. I concluded to write to my cousin, Mrs. Wells, the lady that I am staying with now."

Hal listened to this story with great interest. He thought he saw some daylight through it, but he was by no means sure.

"Was Mrs. Wells one of your childhood's friends?" he asked.

"No. I knew very little about her. She lived out of the city until recently. We are very good friends now, though."

"Well, I wrote to her, and got an answer that made me distrust Miss Perkins more than ever. Mrs. Wells invited me cordially to come to the city and make my home with her. And she gave me such an account of the gayeties of the city that I grew eager to return."

"But I continued a little fearful. Miss Perkins had made an impression on me. I was afraid of some disaster if I should disobey her."

"Go on. It is very interesting," said Hal, as she paused in her story.

"Well, the next thing was a letter from Mr. Judkin."

"Ah! There's where Judkin steps in again."

"I had more than one letter from Mr. Judkin. In fact, I had quite a correspondence with him."

"Have you kept them?"

"No. He asked me to burn them, and I did. There may possibly be one of them among my papers."

"Why did he want them burned?"

"They were about matters that he said it was not best to leave on paper."

"That looks suspicious."

"It didn't seem so to me. Mr. Judkin told me a good many interesting things."

"What were they?"

"He gave me the reason why I had been taken from Philadelphia. It seems my father left a much larger estate than I had any knowledge of."

"He left it in charge of Miss Perkins and Pat Lyon, the locksmith, as executors. That was the first I ever heard of Mr. Lyon."

"So that's Pat Lyon's first entrance on the stage?"

"These executors, he said, were trying to cheat me out of my property. I had always been made to believe that it was small. He said it was their plan to keep me away until it was all settled, give me a small portion, and pocket the balance."

"And he declared that they would take good care to keep me from returning to the city at any time soon."

"What else did he say?"

"That I must return. That my interests demanded it. He was working against the schemes of my enemies, but could do nothing decided without having me on the ground. But my return must be as secret as my departure."

"For what reason?"

"He gave two good reasons. In the first place, he wanted to let them go on until they had reached a point in their villainy that would bring them into the power of the law. Then I must be ready to appear and blast their schemes."

"In the next place, if they knew I was in the city, they would stop at no means to dispose of me. They would not let the life of a little girl stop them in their road to fortune, he hinted."

"I wish you had kept that letter," murmured Hal.

"Does it not seem as if he was right?" broke out May, hastily. "It was agreed that my residence with Mrs. Wells should be kept a complete secret."

"And yet, in the short time I have been in the city, my liberty, and perhaps my life, have been three times in danger. What am I to think of that? You, as you informed me yourself, told Miss Perkins of my return."

"I can understand her behavior now," remarked Hal. "I thought she acted very queer."

"You live with Mr. Lyon. You must have told him also. Very well. It turns out just as I was told. No sooner do they know of my return than my life is constantly threatened."

"You are good at putting this and that together," said Hal, with a smile. "But there is

a point or two you have not considered. In the first place, Miss Clifford, you were attacked on your first entrance to the city. Now it was not till after that that I told Miss Perkins. Who in the city knew of your coming?"

"Nobody but Mr. Judkin and Mrs. Wells," she answered, in a tone of surprise.

"Very well. And since then you have kept quiet, and let no one know where you were living. I don't forget how neatly you ran away from me," he laughed. "How came you out of doors that time, after night?"

"I have been taking airings in a close carriage so nobody could see me. The carriage and horses were Mrs. Wells's property. But she was not using them, so I hired a coachman."

"Recommended by Mr. Judkin?"

"Yes," she faintly replied. "That day I had been to Mr. Judkin's country house, ten miles out. He made it so agreeable that it was late when I set out to return. Some of the harness broke on the road, so that we lost a great deal of time, and it was far after dark when we reached the city. You know the rest. The coachman proved a traitor."

"He was Judkin's tool. The whole affair was a scheme of Judkin's."

"It looks so," she faltered.

"So was the last, when you went to see your old nurse, in company with a maid provided by Judkin. The letter you received was a forged one. I have seen your nurse to-day, and she is as well as you are. She denies that she ever wrote any such letter."

Miss Clifford grew suddenly pale, and fell back in her chair in a half fainting condition. These sudden and alarming revelations had been too much for her.

Hal was on his feet in an instant and rushed to her assistance, with a haste and tenderness rather more than the occasion called for. He clasped her hand, rubbed her pale temples, called on her with a pleading tenderness that quickly replaced the pallor in the lady's face with a mantling blush.

She sat up in her chair, and withdrew her hand from his.

"There. It is over now. You have frightened me," she murmured, yet with a look as if she was far from displeased at Hal's tenderness of manner. "But what am I to think of all this? You yourself tell me that the secret of my life is that I am heir to a large fortune. Does not this agree with my previous information?"

"Not quite. The fortune I mean was not left by your father. And the executors are not those you have named. Whether you are one of the heirs or not is another question, which cannot yet be answered. I need more information than you have given me. I fear there is one detail of your life you have left out. If not, then you are not the heir."

"What is that?" she demanded, quickly. "I cannot conjecture what you mean."

"The heir to that estate must have in his or her possession the family record of the Newtons. Have you, or have you ever had, such a document?"

The color vanished again from her face, and was replaced by a deep pallor. She grew suddenly disturbed and agitated.

"What do you mean? Who has told you of that?" she demanded, imperiously.

"That's not to the point. Have you it? I must have an answer, yes or no."

Her agitation redoubled. Several times she began to speak, and checked herself. Then she leaned impulsively forward, laid her hands upon his arm, and looked in his face with searching and eloquent eyes.

"You are my friend? Truly?" she demanded.

"I would die for you," he replied.

"Then I will tell you all, for I believe and trust you. I have that record. You are the first person I have ever told so. It is the great secret of my life."

"Have you it safe?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that that is the purpose of your enemies? It is that record they are after."

"But how can they know about it?" she cried, opening her eyes widely. "It was given me secretly by my father. I was not to breathe a word about it till I was past twenty years of age, and was asked for it by parties who could show their authority."

"Judkin knew about it," said Hal.

"Ah! I begin to see by what a net I have been surrounded," she exclaimed, with an involuntary shiver. "What shall I do?"

"Don't let Judkin know by any sign that you mistrust him. He must be kept deceived. He must get too deep into crime to return or escape."

"And what else?"

"That record. It is not safe in your hands. You had better give it to me for safe-keeping."

"No, no. Nobody shall have that but myself."

"It may be stolen from you."

"I do not fear that," she answered, with a smile of confidence. "It is safely concealed."

"Have you ever read it? Do you know what it means?"

"Yes. It is a record of the descendants of Herbert Newton, who died eighty years ago. It is copied from church docketts and attested under oath before court officers. I don't know its object."

"Who are those descendants?"

"There are two lines of descent. One ended with my father. I am the only person left in that line. The other line also ends in a single person. It is the line of descent from Herbert Newton's daughter, who was married by one John Price, her father's cousin. I do not know if that person has left any children."

"What is his name?"

"It is a woman. Her name is Ellen Brain-tree."

"Jupiter!" ejaculated Hal, springing from his chair, with a face full of astonishment.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed. "Is anything wrong, Mr. Prince?"

"I think a bee stung me," he answered, in confusion. "Excuse me, Miss Clifford; I must go. At once. Don't breathe a word of what you have said to Mr. Judkin. Between you and me I fancy that worthy gentleman is going to be astonished."

He was hurrying toward the door, a little too hastily for politeness.

"But you must explain," she declared, impulsively. "You always call out Jupiter when you hear something surprising. What do you mean by Jupiter? It was that woman's name made you spring up. Who is she? What do you know about her?"

"Maybe nothing. Maybe a great deal. I can't say a word more now. I want time to act—and to think. I will see you again soon, and tell you something interesting."

Opening the door, he was off before the surprised young lady had time for another question.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRIAL.

IN the week after the events just narrated the case of the Drover's Bank *versus* Patrick Lyon was called in the Court of Common Pleas of the city of Philadelphia. It was a trial which excited much public interest, and was attended by a goodly number of prominent citizens.

There were various opinions as to the case. Many persons were on the side of the bank, and believed the prisoner guilty. A smaller number believed him innocent. No trace of any other robber had been found. And Pat's success in opening the vault door convinced the majority that he would have no trouble in opening the much easier bank doors. And it would be no trouble for him to make a duplicate of the key with which he had unlocked the vault.

Adding to this the story of the papers found concealed in the yard of his house, and the presumption seemed seriously against him. The fact that these papers had proved to be forgeries had not been made public.

It is not surprising, then, that when the locksmith was put on trial, the great mass of the dense audience looked upon him as guilty, and confidently expected a verdict against him.

As the case was skillfully put by the prosecution his innocence grew more and more questionable. The facts were brought out about the loss of the vault key, the application to the locksmith, and the strange ability with which he had succeeded in picking one of the best-devised locks ever made.

Other locksmiths were put on the witness-stand, and an effort made to show that only a man who had specially studied the art of lock-picking could have had such success.

We must be pardoned for somewhat briefly describing the events of this trial. It has but a side bearing upon our story, and does not need to be detailed in full. We will therefore run over it somewhat rapidly.

The officers who had searched Pat Lyon's house were next put upon the stand. Their poor success in the house was merely touched on, but great scope was given to their finding of the papers in the yard.

To prove the character of these papers the president and cashier of the Drover's Bank were called to the witness-stand. They both freely testified that the papers were copies, but declared that the originals were among the papers stolen from the bank.

In cross-examination they were asked if such copies had been made at any previous time. This they positively denied. Then the hidden copies must have been made after the robberies? Yes. For what purpose? What object could the thief have to gain by concealing copies of stolen documents?

They were not permitted to answer this question by their attorney. They were not there to give opinions, but facts only.

President Hines bore this examination with his usual steadiness of countenance. There was not a change in a line of his dignified face. The same cannot be said for Mr. Judkin. He grew flushed at certain questions. But there was a concealed triumph in his glance as he fixed his eyes on the indignant face of the prisoner. That his agent had proved false to him in copying the papers and hiding the copies he well knew. But Jerry Bounce had disappeared, and, so far as

he knew, there was only one apprentice's word to prove that the originals had been found on Jerry.

He was prepared to give Hal Prince a severe cross-examination, and try to prove that he himself had copied the papers and hidden the copies, and that the only treachery in the case was his treachery to his master.

It was his object to show that the production of the originals was an after scheme devised between the locksmith and his apprentice, and that the disappearance of Jerry Bounce was their work. He had been got out of the way so that he could not disprove the apprentice's testimony.

It was a very well-devised plan to get out of an awkward predicament. Unfortunately for its success, the sharp cashier did not know all the circumstances. He was destined to have his eyes opened before the trial ended.

The case of the prosecution ended with this testimony, and the defense opened.

The somewhat excited and indignant look with which the prisoner had listened to the case as so far conducted, was changed for a composed and confident air as his own sharp-looking counsel rose to address the court.

Those of the audience who had their eyes fixed on his face saw that there was something in the wind and turned with new interest to the legal argument.

It was a short one. The opening portion of the case for the prosecution was passed over with a few satirical words.

No evidence would be offered in rebuttal, for there was nothing to rebut, declared the lawyer. It had only been proved that the locksmith was a skilled artisan in his trade, and there was no law to send a man to prison for knowing his business.

If there were such a law, the gentlemen on the other side of the case had nothing to be afraid of, he satirically hinted. They would never be sent to prison for knowing their business.

The whole case hinged on a single point, he said—that of the concealed papers.

He expected to prove that his client had nothing to do with concealing those papers. He was going to try to show that a base conspiracy had been devised to send his client to prison, and to screen the real criminals.

If this could be proved the accused must be declared innocent. There was not another shadow of doubt against him.

The officers who had searched Pat Lyon's house were again put on the stand. The only questions asked them were in relation to certain scratches on the fence leading to the yard in which the papers had been found.

They testified to finding fresh scratches, which might have been made by somebody climbing the fence.

No trace of footsteps had been discovered. But the ground was hard and dry. It could not have taken the track of a foot.

Alderman Jones was next called.

He testified to receiving the papers from the apprentice of the accused prisoner. Those found buried were already in his possession.

He had sent for Messrs. Hines and Judkin, who had declared that these new-found papers were the originals, and that the former ones were forged copies.

He declared also that they did not know his object in asking these questions, but that he had sprung the thing on them.

The two bank officers were recalled to the stand and asked to decide between the papers now put in evidence, which were the originals and which forgeries.

Mr. Judkin looked a little confused. But the president preserved his usual stolid composure. They selected the originals without hesitation.

Alderman Jones now being recalled declared that he had put private marks on the papers brought him by Mr. Prince, the apprentice. On examining the papers selected as originals he showed that they bore these private marks, while the others were destitute of such marks. This point was therefore clearly settled. There was no doubt left that the buried papers were forgeries.

Harry Prince was the next witness called. Mr. Judkin nudged his lawyer significantly. Now was the time to get in their work. If they could disprove the testimony of this witness the whole case for the defense was lost.

But President Hines sat without a change of face. If he had any personal interest in the matter he trusted the management of the case to his shrewd cashier.

Hal testified to the papers. They were those he had given to Alderman Jones. When asked where he had obtained them, he replied that they had been given to him by Jack Riley, one of his fellow apprentices.

At this declaration there was a stir at the point occupied by the prosecuting attorney and his clients.

Mr. Judkin half-rose from his chair and grew red in the face. Even the dignified and stolid president condescended to look surprised, with some signs of secret uneasiness.

"You received them from Jack Riley? Under what circumstances? Relate the story."

"It isn't much of a story," replied Hal. "The

night I got them I come across the boys having a bit of sport."

"Of sport? What kind of sport?"

"They were bouncing Jerry Bounce. That's all. They had found him out in some dirty work and were giving him a lesson. But that's something I had nothing to do with. When I came up I told them to let Jerry go. They'd given him enough to remember. Then Jack Riley handed me a bunch of papers, which he said he had found in Jerry's pockets. He wanted to know what I thought of them."

"Well? Go on."

"I opened them. It was too dark to read them, but I thought they looked like the papers found in Mr. Lyon's yard."

"What did you do then?"

"I told them maybe they'd best finish Jerry's scorching. Likely he deserved it."

This admission raised a suppressed laugh in the court-room.

"Then I left them," continued Hal. "I went to hunt up Alderman Jones. But I could not find him. I took the papers home and kept them till next morning, when I took them again to the alderman."

A few more questions, and Hal was handed over for cross-examination.

The prosecuting attorney was confused, however. His line of action had been quite upset by the unexpected character of the testimony. As to the bank officers, Mr. Judkin looked out of sorts. President Hines was more composed externally, but a good judge of character could have seen that he was anything but easy in his mind.

There was but one thing open to the cross-examination. This was to try to show that the papers given Alderman Jones were not those received from Jack Riley. They might have been changed in the night by some interested party.

Hal was asked if he slept soundly, if he left his room door unlocked, if any one could enter his room without waking him. He replied affirmatively to all these questions. Who else were in the house? Miss Lyon and the kitchen girl. Miss Lyon was a sister of the accused? Yes. She had a strong affection for him? Yes. She would be anxious to aid him? No doubt. Did she know your sleeping habits? She ought to. Then it would have been possible for Miss Lyon to enter your room in the night, take the papers you had received from your pocket, and replace them by others, without waking or disturbing you? It might have been. I am a sound sleeper, admitted Hal.

"That will do, Mr. Prince," said the lawyer, turning to the jury with an air of triumph.

There was a stir in the court at what seemed admissions fatal to the case of the prisoner. Mr. Judkin lifted up his head quickly. The eyes of President Hines had a clearer look.

"One moment, Mr. Prince," said the lawyer for the defense.

Hal turned to him with a very quiet face. He had not told his whole story yet.

"You say that Miss Lyon might have removed those papers without your knowledge. Did she know that you had them?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am sure I did not see her after receiving them. And nobody else could have told her."

"Are these the papers that you had from Jack Riley?"

He handed Hal the documents.

"Yes, sir."

"How can you be sure of that?" broke in the prosecuting attorney, impulsively.

"Because they did not leave my pocket from the time I got them from Jack Riley until I was ready to go to bed. Then I opened and examined them by the candlelight. I read part of both of them, and I saw they read word for word like the papers found in Mr. Lyon's yard. That is why I am ready to swear that these are the same papers."

"That will do. You may step down."

Hal left the witness stand with an assured step. He had made his point, and he looked triumphantly at his foe, Mr. Judkin, who seemed again out of sorts.

"John Riley!" called the court officer.

The 'prentice stepped forward, dressed in his working suit, and with as careless a manner as if this was his every-day business.

It is not necessary to give his testimony and that of the other apprentice witnesses that were called. They fully confirmed Hal's story as to the finding of the papers on Jerry Bounce.

"I have tried to procure this Jerry Bounce as a witness," remarked the attorney. "Alderman Jones has employed every means to find him, but without success. He has either run away as a principal in the robbery, or been spirited away as an agent of some greater rascals than himself."

"Do you mean to hint that the prosecution has had anything to do with his disappearance?" cried the opposing attorney, rising in great heat.

"I should be sorry to hint that my worthy brother was a greater rascal than this runaway rogue," answered the suave lawyer.

His opponent sat down very hastily, while a ripple of laughter ran round the court.

"But, with the permission of his Honor, I should like to show the court why I hint that he may have been spirited away."

"Proceed, Mr. Smith," said the judge.

Thus permitted, Mr. Smith recalled Alderman Jones, and requested him to tell the story of what means he had taken to find the runaway.

He was followed by Hal, who related how he had tracked Mr. Judkin to his interview with Toby. He had his eye on Judkin as he spoke, and much enjoyed that gentleman's very marked surprise and uneasiness.

He ended by telling how Toby had left him in the lurch.

The next witness called was the 'prentice who had overheard the conversation between Toby and Jerry Bounce from his shop window.

He detailed this conversation. How Toby had said that the old man was raging mad, and that Jerry had got to cut stick and slide away.

It need not be said that this evidence made a decided sensation in the court. It was plain that the prisoner's party had grown very strong, and the faces of the jury showed the same thing.

Many eyes were turned on Mr. Judkin. But this personage sat with his face on his hand. Yet it could be seen that he was a little pale.

"I should like to offer the boy Toby as a witness," continued Mr. Smith. "But he, like Jerry Bounce, is not to be found. He has also been spirited away. I rest my case here."

We may hurry through the balance of the trial.

The addresses to the jury were very short. The latter whispered together in their seats for a few minutes.

"Are you prepared to render a verdict?" asked the judge.

"We are, your Honor."

"What is your verdict? Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

Their words were half-drowned in the sudden uproar of excitement that arose in the court.

CHAPTER XXII.

JUDKIN SHOWS HIS HAND.

"It is my turn now," cried Pat Lyon, walking the floor of his salesroom excitedly. "They have had their day, and have done their worst. But he laughs best who laughs last. I am going to get my work in now. I have just directed my lawyer, Mr. Smith, to bring suit against the Drover's Bank for fifty thousand dollars damages for false imprisonment."

"Do you think you will get it?" asked Hal, who was seated in an easy attitude on a corner of the counter.

"I will try, at any rate."

It was a week after the date of the trial. During that week Pat had held a reception daily at his shop. He never knew before how many friends he had. And his business had suddenly increased so that he had had to put two extra hands to work. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good.

People had talked of a conspiracy against him, and some had even hinted that Judkin, the cashier, knew more about the robbery than he let on. His peculiar behavior at the trial was not forgotten.

Pat was strongly advised to bring a charge against him of bank robbery.

"That is the business of the law officers, not mine," he dryly answered. "I have no proof against him."

"I intend to have," declared Alderman Jones, who was present. "As sure as you live he is one of them. But I doubt if he is the chief one. Wait. Time tells many things. It is hard to hide ugly secrets."

"I intend the bank shall pay me for my imprisonment," answered Pat. "That's where the shoe pinches me."

After a week's time his friends began to let him alone, and he had time to think and look about him. The conversation with his 'prentice, of which we have given some words, followed.

"It is time now to talk of something else," continued the locksmith. "That bank business is only one point in a much deeper scheme. You know that, Hal?"

"You bet I do. I can look through a knot-hole with the next fellow."

"It is that other scheme in which we are interested now. I am going to unearth the whole business, and I want your aid."

"Say it's against Judkin, and I'm yours while there's a hair left."

Pat smiled at the enthusiasm of his apprentice.

"And in favor of Miss Clifford? Eh, Hal?"

"Just wait till you see her," declared Hal, earnestly. "I ain't often sweet on them, but she's enough to turn a chap's head."

"I've no doubt she's an angel. But business is business, Hal; even if we're dealing with angels. Did you ask her the question I advised you to?"

"About the Newton family record?"

"Yes."

"I did."

"What answer did you get?"

"She has it."

"Good," exclaimed Pat, with a show of great

satisfaction. "That clears up a multitude of troubles. I must see that, without delay. Did you get it from her, as I advised?"

"No. She had it safely concealed, she said. It had been given her by her father, and she was not to let it out of her keeping until she was asked for it, at the proper time, by the proper parties."

"She's a sensible young lady, anyhow. But I must see her. It is highly important that I should know the contents of that paper."

"Why?" asked Hal. "You tell me that you are not the other heir. What are you?"

"I'll leave you to guess," answered the locksmith, with a laugh. "There are some things it don't do to talk about. You shall know all in good time."

"It's a confounded mixed up business," muttered Hal. "They didn't try to lock you up for ten years just to get a chance to hunt for that paper. They had some deeper game. What was it?"

"It was a game that will keep. You shall know all in a month or two. Perhaps sooner. What I want now is an interview with Miss Clifford. I want you to see her and arrange for an interview to-morrow evening."

"All right," answered Hal, very glad of an excuse to call on the young lady.

"And that is not all. There is another person I want present at that interview."

"It isn't Judkin?"

"Hardly. After you have arranged with Miss Clifford I want you to call on Miss Perkins and ask her to be present."

"Miss Perkins?" cried Hal, in surprise.

"Exactly. You know where she lives?"

"But what has that old maid to do with it?"

"If you live long enough you will find out. You can be present too, to see that we don't fly away with your lady-love."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Hal, jerking away in some confusion.

He seized his hat and coat, and prepared to set out on his errand.

His departure was preceded by that of another party, who had been present at the interview without the knowledge of the parties concerned.

The windows of the salesroom had been raised, and this conversation had taken place by the counter, near the front part of the room.

Outside the building, but leaning against the wall just below one of the windows, was a youthful figure, dressed in ragged costume, but with a face sharp enough for one twice his age.

It was, in fact, the boy Toby, Hal's evil genius. He had been listening intently, and his sharp ears had taken in every word that had been spoken.

He slipped away, however, in a hurry, as soon as he heard signs of Hal's departure. His ears tingled yet from his last interview with that young gentleman.

"Bet high I've picked up somethin' wuth a hoss-chestnut," he declared with a look of great satisfaction. "I hate that there dogged 'prentice like I hate p'ison, and I'm goin' to get even with him yet. And I know where I kin sell what I've jist picked up fur a fiver. Won't giv' it out fur a red penny shorter."

Just where he went and what he did with his information it is not necessary to describe.

It will suffice to say that when Mr. Judkin entered Mrs. Wells's house early the next day, he knew all about the interview that had been arranged for that evening, and was prepared to make the best use of it for his own purposes.

Three hours afterward Mrs. Wells left home on a visit to the country. She would not be back till the next day, she told her cousin, Miss Clifford. She must try and enjoy herself.

"Oh, I will get along," answered May, cheerfully. "Kate will take care of me. I find her a very useful and intelligent girl."

She was, in fact, rather pleased to get rid of Mrs. Wells. The interview arranged for that evening she felt to be an important one, and a free field was an advantage.

If she had known that Mr. Judkin was at the bottom of Mrs. Wells's departure, and that he wished her out of the way for certain purposes of his own, she might not have felt so comfortable.

We may say here, however, that Mrs. Wells was not aware of any schemes against her cousin. She was simply somewhat in Mr. Judkin's power, as the house she lived in belonged to him, and was rented to her at a very low rate. She therefore felt quite willing to accommodate him in any reasonable request.

Mrs. Wells did not know why Mr. Judkin wished her to make this visit. Nor did she care much. She was one of that sort that don't trouble themselves to think, and are ready to do anything agreeable without question.

May and Kate were left alone in the house, with the exception of the girl in the kitchen. Mrs. Wells had taken her maid and coachman with her.

Several hours passed. Miss Clifford sat at the window engaged in some easy work, and chatting familiarly with Kate. They continued to sit there until late in the evening.

Darkness had long since settled over the city. The street lamps were burning dimly and far

apart. It was not yet the day of brilliant street lighting.

"There come my visitors now," said May, as the bell gave a sharp tingle. "Here, Kate, take this work away."

Kate retired with the fancy work with which her mistress had been amusing herself. As she drew back into the hall a gentleman was ascending the stairs. She caught a glimpse of his face, and could hardly restrain herself from screaming.

She had recognized in this visitor one of the strange tenants of her former residence, the man who had sworn her to secrecy.

The frightened girl hastily withdrew, while the visitor, without seeing her, walked on to the door of the sitting-room, and lightly tapped.

"Come in," spoke the voice of May.

He opened the door and entered.

She started up in surprise.

"Mr. Judkin! This is an unexpected visit! I was expecting—"

"Whom?"

"Oh, never mind. This is not very polite in me. Let me have your hat, Mr. Judkin. I am sorry that Mrs. Wells is not at home."

"I am not. I came to see you, May."

"Not on business?" She was growing distrustful of Mr. Judkin.

"Yes. Sit still, my child. It is a matter of great importance to your future life I wish to talk with you about."

"Important business, Mr. Judkin?" Her eyes opened wide.

"It is approaching the time when the mystery surrounding you must be removed, May, and the schemes of your enemies baffled. You have been surrounded by dangers since you have been in the city of which you have no comprehension, and which only my watchfulness has saved you from."

"I know some of my dangers," answered May, spiritedly. "I know that three attempts were made to abduct me, and that each time I was saved by a daring young apprentice, with the heart of a knight of the olden time."

"Yes, yes, I know of all that. He is the apprentice of one of the chief of your foes. He has sadly baffled his master's plans. Do you know the object of these efforts?"

"No."

"I am here to enlighten you, and to save you from a worse danger. What that danger is I will tell you. You are aware, May, that I was the close friend and confidant of your father?"

"Oh, certainly," she replied, with some warmth. "I know that he put every trust in you."

She began to think that she was ungrateful in her distrust of Mr. Judkin.

"There is a secret which you supposed confined to yourself. It is that which your father gave you on his death-bed, when he intrusted you with a missive which you was not to make public till your twentieth year was completed. Yet this was no secret to me, my dear child. I was his confidant in this also, and was commanded, as his friend, to guard you against any effort of your enemies to rob you of the Newton record."

She started in astonishment. Who else knew of what she had deemed her secret only?

"I have never spoken of this because there was no need. There is serious need now. Therefore I speak. Your enemies are laying their plans to rob you of this valuable document. I am here to thwart them."

May looked at him with commingled emotions. Could it be as he said? Was Hal Prince but an emissary, or an unconscious tool of her enemies?

"Listen to me," he continued. "They have already asked you to deliver up that record. They are to be here to-night to coax or force it from you. Am I not right? Have you not agreed upon an interview with Patrick Lyon and Adele Perkins?"

"Yes," she admitted, wondering at his knowledge, and trembling in dread of some unknown peril.

"And you are alone in the house. Mrs. Wells has left you. Do you know why? Did you dream that she was a confederate of your enemies, and has taken care to leave the ground clear for them?"

"Good heavens!" cried May, now seriously alarmed. "What shall I do? I did not dream of such danger. You have opened my eyes. What shall I do?"

"There is but one thing to do. Put the record in my charge. Then you can defy them. They shall not harm you. I will be near enough to protect you. But I fear that if you keep it they will find some means to get it from you and destroy it."

His words and hints had frightened May more than she had ever been frightened in her life before. She was thrown into a sort of panic that prevented her from any exercise of reason.

"Wait," she cried, wildly, as she ran from the room.

A smile of triumphant satisfaction passed over the villain's specious face. He was about to gain that for which he had so long vainly

wrought, and with an ease that he had not hoped for

It was concealed somewhere. He had not failed to search May's room and trunk for it. He was going to get it now without search.

Within five minutes she returned. She was still in a flutter of fear. In her right hand she bore a small flat case of oiled silk.

"Here!" she cried. "I have it! I intrust it to you as my father's friend! You alone can save me from my enemies!"

He rose gravely from his chair and moved toward her with a dignified step. He felt too sure of his prize to show any eagerness.

But he was destined to find that "there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." For at that moment the slender form of Kate ran between him and his destined victim. She hastily pushed back the hand of her mistress, and cried out:

"Don't give it to him! He is a villain and a traitor! I know him! I know him!"

"Kate! She here? Confusion!" ejaculated Judkin, as he fell back a step.

"He made me swear not to tell what I overheard," cried Kate. "But he shall not ruin you, as he threatened! He laid plans to get that paper from you! It was he that laid the ambush to capture you and make you give it up!"

"Hold your tongue, fool, or by heavens—"

"I won't! I don't fear you now! I will speak and save my mistress!"

"And I will have that paper!"

Thrusting Kate rudely aside he sprang toward where May was standing in a dazed attitude, and made a desperate clutch for the package which she yet held.

She thrust it behind her and turned to run.

He pursued her, with a face inflamed with rage and energy.

Into the hall she fled, and into the midst of a group of persons, who were at that moment advancing toward the sitting-room. They consisted of Pat Lyon, Hal Prince and Miss Perkins.

She recognized but one, her 'prentice friend.

"Take this!" she cried, thrusting the packet into his hand. "He would rob me of it. Keep it. Do not let him have it."

In surprise Hal seized the packet, threw an arm round her protectingly, and turned to face her foe.

"Judkin!" he cried, in astonishment.

The baffled villain faced the group of his enemies for a minute, with a face inflamed with rage and disappointment. Then, with an oath, he turned and ran for the stairs.

Had they seen the look of malignity that came upon his face at that moment, they would not have gone on so quietly into the room before them.

They fancied him disarmed. They did not know the devilry of which he was capable.

Reaching the lower floor he turned toward the rear, and entered a room to the left. As he did so a man rose to meet him. It was the black-whiskered fellow of the fight at the locksmith's.

"I am foiled," he cried, harshly. "There is but one thing left. Are you prepared?"

"One hundred down was the word."

"Here it is. You shall have the balance after the work is done. Is the girl gone?"

"Yes."

"In an hour then. Or sooner, if you hear signs of their moving. Be sure and lock and bar every door. Can I trust you?"

"I reckon you can."

He hastened to depart.

In just one hour afterward his black-whiskered agent also made his way out, by the rear.

And in the room he had left there was a crackling sound, a flash of light, and a creeping cloud of smoke.

The secret was out. The house was on fire. And Judkin's foes were firmly locked and barred in the burning mansion!

CHAPTER XXIII.

CAUGHT IN A FIRE-TRAP.

A HALF-HOUR passed slowly by. Then the lower windows of the house of Mrs. Wells began to display signs of a strange illumination within.

The faint gleam from the windows grew stronger and stronger. Suddenly there was a crackling of glass, and a red tongue of flame was thrust out, as from the jaws of some demon within. A puff of white smoke went up.

Then, from the lips of a youthful figure, who had been watching the house with curious eyes, was screamed the alarm cry of "Fire! Fire!"

It was the young Arab, Toby, whose yell of alarm thus rung through the street.

It brought a quick response. Hurrying feet were heard. People came rushing into the street. Windows of adjoining houses were thrown up, and frightened heads thrust out.

Cries filled the street. Many of the younger folks rushed away to the engine-houses. It was long before the days of electric alarms, and of steam fire-engines. Everything was yet done in the old primitive fashion.

It seemed as if the whole neighborhood would

be aroused before the people of the house took the alarm. The whole lower portion of the house seemed in a light flame, and yet no sign of life appeared within.

The rapidly gathering throng looked at one another with anxiety.

"Is the house empty?" went from mouth to mouth.

"Who has an ax? Burst in the door! Smash those upper windows! Will the firemen never come?"

A rattle of stones broke in the glass of the windows of the second floor. Out rushed a cloud of white smoke. The gleam of flames appeared. The fire had already eaten through the ceiling, and climbed upward from the ground floor.

At this moment, to the alarm and excitement of the spectators, the windows of the third floor were thrown up, and the heads of human beings appeared.

There were the forms both of men and women, clearly revealed in the bright glare that shot from the lower windows.

"Good heavens! the house is full of people!" cried an excited voice. "Why do you stay up there? Hurry down, before it is too late!"

"It is too late now," came a strong voice from above. "We are trapped in here. The door is secured. It is impossible for us to escape. Bring axes and ladders. Burst your way in. The flames are cutting us off."

A man rushed through the crowd armed with an ax, and began to assail the front door with quick, violent blows.

A dozen strong strokes around the lock, and it gave way. The door flew open. In rushed a half-dozen bold men.

But they retreated as quickly. A sweep of blinding flames and smothering smoke had poured into their faces. The stairs were all in a light blaze. It was impossible for mortal man to ascend.

At the same time the quick clangor of the alarm-bells rung through the air, sending out the wild fire peal, and rousing the quiet city from end to end.

And then, with wild whoop and yell, a long line of men and boys came sweeping into the street, dragging after them, by a long rope, one of the old-time, lumbering fire-engines.

"Ladders! Bring ladders!" screamed the voice from the upper windows.

"Don't jump. Ladders are coming. We will have you out safely."

The flames were now bursting freely from the lower windows, driving back the spectators.

As the engine rattled into the street they burst from the second floor windows, and shot upward in red lines to the windows above, where stood the entrapped group.

They were forced to retreat from the open windows. They had hardly done so ere a gleam of light shot through these openings. The climbing flames had eaten their way through the third floor, and were cutting off the last hope of the unfortunates within.

"To the roof! To the roof!" cried a powerful voice. "Here come the ladders! We will soon have you out!"

By this time the firemen had got their engine at work, and water was beginning to battle the flames. And now with surge and whoop other engines and hose-carriages rushed upon the scene.

The house stood alone, with ten clear feet of space between it and the neighboring houses on each side. There was no chance to escape over the roofs of these houses.

"Here comes the ladder! Up with it! Never mind the fire! The house is done for! Get out those people inside!"

The ladder was hastily elevated. It just reached the sills of the third floor windows, out of which flames were pouring with growing strength.

Several daring firemen ran swiftly up. The foremost of them sprang boldly through the window into the blazing room.

But he was immediately forced to retreat and dropped over the window-sill in a fainting attitude. He was dragged out and helped down the ladder by his friends outside.

"It can't be done!" cried one of the firemen. "Flesh and blood can't face that fire."

"There they are! On the roof! On the roof!" yelled a voice.

Every eye was directed upward. There, clearly revealed by the bright blaze stood five figures, two men and three women.

The older man was shouting something to the people in the street, but his voice was drowned in the uproar of sounds and the roar of the flames.

His effort was followed by a shrill alarm whistle, that was audible over all other sounds, and that caused an instant excitement in many of the persons present.

"Prentices! Prentices!" rose the cry. "It is Hal Prince! It is the Prince! To him, lads! We must get him off! Prentices! Prentices! To the rescue! To the rescue!"

A group of youthful forms began to push and hustle through the crowd, full of excitement and energy.

A signal whistle sounded from below. Toward it the prentices pushed.

"Here, lads, here!" cried the voice of Jack Riley. "Follow me! We will save him yet! Prentices to the rescue!"

It looked like a forlorn hope. The flames that now burst profusely from the windows of the third floor had reached the eaves of the house, around which they were curling in ugly lines.

Within these windows all seemed a sea of fire. The house seemed a mere flimsy fire-trap, and the flames made their way upward with surprising speed.

While efforts were being made to lengthen the ladder a blaze burst through the dry shingles of the roof and began hungrily to lick the inflammable material.

The frightened fugitives from the flames were seen to move back with awe-struck faces. They vanished from sight of the throng in the street, cut off from view by a screen of smoke and fire.

"Good heavens! can nothing be done?" came the despairing cry. "The ladder! The ladder! It must be made to reach the roof!"

"Less blow and more muscle," growled a grizzled fireman, who was busily engaged in lashing an extra length to the ladder. "We're doing our best, so don't burst your throats. How's your side, Jake? Is it tight?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Then up with it! It's a slim chance, but we can do no more."

Twenty pairs of hands seized the ladder and raised its tottering head toward the roof. Up it went. Up, up. It had to be moved to the very corner of the house to avoid the flames.

It struck the wall at length, but a good two feet below the eaves. A groan of disappointment went up from the throng.

Yet nothing daunted several of the boldest firemen ran hastily up the rungs of the ladder.

The foremost of them had reached the top-most rung, and had just grasped the eaves with one hand, when there came from below a wild cry of warning and alarm.

"Ware! Ware! The roof is sinking in! It is going to fall! Back! Back!"

Even firemen are mortal, and the bold fellows drew back in terror at this cry.

The fugitives had now vanished from sight for several minutes, driven back by the flames, which were now shooting high from every visible part of the inflammable roof.

As the cry rose up the roof had been seen to sink slowly downward, with a slight swaying motion.

For a full minute it hung so, while the imperiled firemen hastily retreated down the ladder to the ground.

Then, with a graceful swoop, it heavily sunk, and came down with a thundering surge into the interior of the building, while a perfect torrent of flame and smoke surged up high into the air, roaring and curling as if in mad triumph over the victims who had been engulfed by the crimson sea.

Many of the spectators turned away sick from the dreadful spectacle. Groans of dismay went up from others. Cries that were almost screams rent the air from the more excitable.

"It is horrible! Horrible! And we forced to see human beings roasted before our eyes!"

Meanwhile the firemen plied their engines with unceasing energy. They had their duty to perform. They had no time for feeling or sentiment.

Out of the crowd at this moment pushed another person who had watched the events with more interest than feeling. It was the boy Toby.

"Don't like to see humans burnt up," he muttered. "But 'tain't my fault. And if anybody is to kick the bucket I'm glad it's that galoot as pinched my ears. Anyhow, you bet I'm goin' to make this pay. Old Juddy thinks he's shet my eye up. Not much, honey. That there house didn't set itself afire. He can't fool this chicken, and I'm bound to bleed him heavy."

The shrewd young rogue pushed his way past the burning building, and moved quickly down the street beyond, which was lit up for a considerable distance by the flames.

As he reached the darker region, and turned into a crossing street, a peculiar shout came to his ears from the crowd he had left behind.

"What's busted there now?" he asked himself. "Guess it ain't none o' my funeral though. I'm goin' to bleed Juddy."

He was so full of this idea that he lost some of his usual caution, and was quite unaware that he was followed, at a distance, through the darkened street.

Toby's journey ended at a house at some considerable distance from the scene of the conflagration. Here he paused, and, without taking the trouble to look around him, opened the door and entered.

The house was not very well lighted, but Toby seemed to know his way, and he pushed forward and up the stairs to the second floor, on which there was a stronger light.

This light came from a room, at some distance from the head of the stairs. Voices of men came from the same room. Without hesitating to hear what they had to say, Toby pressed forward.

As he entered the room through the open

door two men sprung up with an exclamation of anger and alarm. They were the officers of the Drover's Bank, President Hines and Cashier Judkin.

"Don't git skeered," said Toby, reassuringly. "It's only me."

"You? You rascal!" cried Judkin, angrily. "What brings you here? How dare you intrude?"

"Just thought I'd drop round and report 'bout that fire," answered Toby.

"What fire?"

"S'pose you've furgot 'bout it. It's kinder queer how you and Tom Black left the house jist afore it busted out. Kind of a coincidence."

"What in the world is the boy talking about?" demanded the president.

"Tryin' to play innercent, you folks. Bet you it don't go down with this coon. Anyhow the old house is gone to smash, and everybody in it burnt up. They got on the roof, and down it went, with the whole crew. Ain't a hoof on 'em left."

The two men cast a strange glance at one another, which did not escape Toby's quick eyes. He read in it a guilty gladness, triumph and security.

"Guess you didn't s'pose Toby was a fool, did ye? Not much, hoss-fly. I ain't goin' to blow on nobody, though. I'm square. But you've got to bleed. I want a cool hundred. Can't git along with a cent less."

The two men again exchanged glances.

"Toby's a good boy," remarked the president. "I don't know what he's talking about now. But we owe him a present. You might give him what he asks, Judkin."

"Very well. Come this way, Toby. You shall have your hundred."

Toby stuck his tongue in his cheek as he followed. But sharp as he was he failed to notice the meaning wink that passed between the two men.

President Hines remained in the room, with some show of uneasiness on his face. Self-possessed as he usually was, he seemed just now a little upset.

Five minutes passed before his confederate returned.

"What luck?" he asked, eagerly. "Did you succeed?"

"Trapped him neatly," was the answer. "The little fool walked into the net. He is safely locked up with the other one."

"Good. They are a dangerous pair at large. We cannot trust them. That lucky fire has cleared our track. If something of the same kind should break out here—"

He did not finish. But his look was full of meaning.

The two men continued to converse for some minutes, with that freedom and loudness that comes from perfect security.

"All is clear," cried the president, joyfully, at length. "The will and the record are gone, and with them every person that need be feared. There remains the other unknown heir. But he is as ignorant of his fortune as we are of his personality. With the older will and the cooked record all is safe. I pass as the lost heir, and there is not a flaw in my title."

"And I?"

"The thirty thousand from the bank robbery is yours. Here is my check for it. You kept the key for security. Are you ready to exchange it for my check?"

"Here is the key. And so ends that episode."

"Not quite," came a strange voice, as two persons sprung suddenly into the room. "I will take care of that key, if you don't mind."

The villains sprung to their feet in undisguised fright. They had reason for their alarm, for before them stood no less a person than Hal Prince, whom they supposed to be burned to ashes in the consumed building.

CHAPTER XXIV.

INSIDE THE BURNING HOUSE.

WE have so far devoted ourselves to the outside of the burning house. It is necessary now to return to its inmates. The sudden appearance of Hal Prince on the scene proved that they had not all perished. How had he escaped?

We left them at the moment that Judkin rushed down the stairs. What followed it is not necessary to relate in detail. The subject of their conversation will come out further on in our narrative.

All that need here be said is that, for fear of Judkin's returning to listen, they sought a room on the third floor for their conversation—very unfortunately, as it proved.

Deeply interested as they were in the subject that engaged them they heard no sound of stealthy footsteps on the floors, of turning keys, or of bars firmly set against the door of exit from the room in which they were.

They even heard nothing of the crackling flames, and failed to heed the growing noise in the street. The fire had made its way from the first to the second floor, and had already caught fast hold on the stairs, up which it was sweeping in terrible haste.

Suddenly they looked at one another as if an idea of danger had come to every mind simultaneously. The room was growing unbearably hot. The noise in the street had increased to an uproar. Pat Lyon sprung from his seat and threw up the window.

And then the appalling truth dawned upon them. A fire-engine was wheeling into the street. The bells of the city were sounding the wild fire-peal. And from the window below them flames were bursting in crimson fans.

A wild chorus of screams came from the women as they looked in dismay on the horror-stricken crowd in the street.

"Keep calm!" cried Pat, in a commanding voice. "Our only hope now rests in our keeping our senses."

He flew to the door and strove to open it. To his utter surprise it was fast. It refused to yield to his hand.

"By the Lord, we are entrapped!" he cried. "This is Judkin's work! He has locked us in and fired the house! Did the fool think to hold Pat Lyon with a common lock?"

With a laugh of contempt Pat set himself to work at the lock, with some tools which by chance were in his pocket.

In less than two minutes it was open. Yet the door held as firmly as before. The entrapped inmates looked at each other with frightened eyes.

With a scream Kate and Miss Perkins ran to the window, as if to fling themselves out.

"Back here!" cried Pat, in a voice of thunder. "Stop them, Hal. Keep cool, Miss Clifford."

"I will try," she replied, with a scared, yet not panic-stricken face.

"That door will not keep me long," he exclaimed, as he picked up the heavy chair in which he had been sitting.

Wielding it with both hands he dealt blow after blow on the door, with the strength of a giant.

The door bent and shivered. The strong chair went into fragments in his hands. Yet with one final blow he tore the portal from its hinges, and sent it reeling out into the hall.

"Follow me," he cried, in a loud voice.

They obeyed. Yet the flying party had taken scarce a step beyond the threshold when they recoiled with a greater terror than they had yet felt. The stairs were a rolling sheet of flames. Escape by that route was impossible.

Nor was the room they had just left any longer tenable. Smoke poured into it thickly through the open door. Flames were rising through its floor.

Even where they stood the smoke was choking thick. Miss Clifford reeled and would have fallen had not Hal caught her in his arms. Pat seized the other two women and dragged them from the dangerous spot.

"To the rear!" he cried. "It is our only hope! There may be another stair!"

Fortunately for them the fire was yet mainly confined to the front of the house. They found the rear rooms clear of anything but smoke. Yet no rear stair could be found, and the windows looked down a sheer twenty feet.

"There is nothing for it but the roof," cried Pat. "We will smother here in two minutes."

He had caught sight of a trap-door with a ladder leading to it in the room in which they stood. It was the work of a second to spring up the ladder, draw the bolt and spring to the roof.

"Pass up the ladies, Hal. And quick."

Hal lost no time in doing so.

Within two minutes the whole party were gathered on the roof, listening to the cry from below to which their sudden appearance had given rise.

Pat answered, but it was evident that his voice was not heard. Then Hal gave the signal whistle of the prentices, whose effect below we have already described.

They looked around them. The flames were already beginning to curl over the edge of the roof. The nearest house was ten or twelve feet distant. They had no possible means to reach it. A fearful death seemed inevitable.

"The ladder!" cried Hal. "It may reach across."

"Not much more than half," answered Pat. "I have thought of it."

The frightened women were past screaming. They had sunk down nervously on the roof. All but May, who yet stood up, pale, but with all her wits about her.

Hal's arm stole around her protectingly.

"Don't be afraid, dear May," he said, tenderly. "If we must die, we will die together. I would rather die with you than live with any other woman, for I love you; I love you with all my soul!"

She made no answer, but she yielded to his encircling arm and looked at him with a glance that was love itself.

Their troth plight was made at that terrible moment, standing on that burning roof.

"Is there nothing to be done?" cried Pat.

"Yes. The prentices. I heard their signal. Ah! and there they come now," answered Hal. "We are safe! We can trust the boys."

He was right. The trap-door of the adjoining house burst open at that moment, and a group of youthful forms appeared on the roof. They were hidden from sight from the street by the ascending screen of smoke and flames.

"Hal! Are you there, Hal?" cried the voice of Jack Riley.

"Ay, ay! Have you any means of escape? What is to be done?"

"Wait. We'll get you off. The jolly 'prentices is about. Pass up them planks, lively!"

A long board was protruded through the trap-door, and seized by those above. Another and another followed until they numbered a full dozen. The quick-witted boys had robbed a neighboring lumber pile.

Now came the flinging them across the gap. They proved long enough, with a foot or two to spare.

They were rather thin to bear the weight of a man, but this was overcome by laying them in a double layer. In a few minutes a bridge extended across the gap, four feet wide, and two inches thick. It was none too soon. The front part of the burning roof was swaying terribly. Flames were beginning to glare through the rear.

Hal seized May's hand and led her hastily over. Kate and Miss Perkins drew back in terror, but Pat pushed them sternly forward, and they were seized by a brace of 'prentices, who jerked them across the perilous bridge.

With little heed to what was behind him Hal hurried his fair charge down the trap-ladder of the house on which they stood. Reaching the lower floor they were met by a lady, who clasped the trembling girl impulsively in her arms.

"Saved! Poor thing!" she cried. "Come with me. Oh, dear! dear! what an escape!"

As she spoke there came a roar from the burning house. The front part of the roof had tumbled in.

Hal stood unnerved. The revulsion of fear was upon him. At that moment Jack Riley seized him by the hand.

"Come with me," he said. "I have found out a thing or two. That young rascal Toby is on the watch, to report to his employers. At least I judge so from his movements. Come. Let us nab him or track him."

In two minutes afterward they were on his track, as we have seen, before the people in the street knew of their escape.

The wild cry which Toby had heard came from these people, who had just learned of the fortunate escape.

But the pursuers went on, until they had trailed Toby into the house that held the villainous confederates, and until they had overheard the plain acknowledgment of their villainy.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END OF A LONG ROAD.

HAL and Jack had followed Toby into the house, and had cautiously advanced to a position which enabled them to overhear the conversation which we have recorded in a preceding chapter.

The scouts looked at one another significantly. Things were coming out with a vengeance.

They had withdrawn into a room whose door stood conveniently open when Judkin and Toby came out into the hall, and had watched them ascend together to the third floor of the building.

"It's getting kind of rich," said Jack in a whisper to his companion. "Do you know where we are?"

"I didn't notice anything except to follow that young rat."

"See here then." Jack crossed the room and pointed to a broken pane in the window. "I did that, Hal. It's never been mended since."

Hal opened his eyes.

"Jupiter! You're right. This is the Seventh street shanty?"

"You bet."

Further conversation was prevented by the return of Judkin. He was alone. He had left Toby somewhere behind him.

The first words spoken told the lads of what had happened. Toby was locked up in the prison-room which Hal had formerly occupied. But who was "the other one?" That was a point to find out.

The spies left their room as the conversation continued, and stole, step by step, toward that occupied by the villains.

Every word fell into their greedy ears. The whole plot of the bank robbery was revealed to them.

"This is mighty rich," whispered Jack to Hal. "We've got to take a hand. Lucky I gave a hint to some of the 'prentice boys to follow us. A whistle will fetch them."

It is not necessary to repeat what we have already told. As the pair of villains laid on the table for exchange the bank key and the thirty thousand check, the concealed boys suddenly sprung into the room and laid hands on these tell-tale articles, with the exclamation already given.

It was a complete surprise. Hines and Judkin fell back a step in consternation as the bold lads sprung forward and seized those perilous prizes.

Then with fierce exclamations they rushed on their young foes.

Hal, on possessing himself of the key, had backed hastily to the wall, and seized a chair for a defensive weapon.

Jack grasped the check, and flew to the window, which he flung up, giving the signal whistle at the same time.

It was instantly answered from below.

"Prentices! Prentices!" he shouted. "We are in danger! Break in! To the rescue! To the rescue!"

Ere he could say more he was grasped by the strong hands of President Hines, whose face was inflamed with fury.

Jack resisted, but he was much too weak for his antagonist, who dragged him back from the window.

"Hold your jaw, you young hound!" he hissed, giving him a hard blow on the mouth with his fist.

"Snatch the rascal! We'll lock them up with the others," he cried to Judkin.

But that was not so easily done. Hal, backed against the wall, was making dangerous sweeps in the air with his chair, keeping Judkin at a safe distance.

"Jump on him, you fool!" yelled the furious president. "Wait, I'll settle this chap and help you. All is lost if they escape."

Jack was squirming in his strong grasp, but in an instant the powerful man had dashed him to the floor, and brought his foot down fiercely on his face.

He lifted it to repeat the blow. But his foot did not come down again. For at that moment Hal sent the chair whirling through the air, taking the villainous president on the side of the head and hurling him like a log to the floor.

Empty-handed now he sprung on Judkin, while Jack, with bleeding face, but game to the last, scrambled to his feet.

How the unequal fight would have ended we cannot tell. For while these events were taking place the door below had opened and quick steps were heard in the hall.

There came a whistle this time from Hal, who had grappled and was fiercely wrestling with Judkin.

Up the stairs came the steps. Into the room with a chorus of cries burst a half-dozen of the 'prentices, well-grown, athletic lads, whom hard work had made strong as young lions.

"Hey, 'prentices! to it!" cried Jack. "Snatch these fellows! Tie them! They're bank robbers! Don't let them escape!"

The president had by this time regained his feet. A glance showed him the odds against him. The door was occupied. He ran to the window, with a desperate purpose to spring out to the pavement below.

But ere he could do so Jack was upon him, aided by three of his youthful allies. The villain, powerful-framed as he was, was hauled back into the room and held immovable by four pairs of strong arms.

The others rushed upon Judkin, whom Hal had just brought to the floor by a shrewd trip. The lesser villain lacked the strength and energy of his vigorous employer.

Hal, even while struggling with Judkin, felt that he had learned something new and important. The cashier, after all, was but the tool of a man who had kept in the background, and who had only now shown his hand.

Five minutes more sufficed for the finish. One of the boys found some strong cord in a closet, and ere long the villains, despite their threats and protestations, were trussed up like a pair of lambs in the slaughter-house.

Offers of money followed, but they were treated with disdain.

"I suppose you'll give us this thirty thousand check if we'll let you slide," suggested Hal.

"Yes, yes! Take it, and set us free."

"Guess I will. Guess I'll keep it to plaster my face where you kicked me. But you're too good-looking. I don't think somehow that we can spare you."

"Come this way, Jack," cried Hal. "Let the boys take care of them. There's another little job to be done. I want to see Toby."

"And 'the other one,'" suggested Jack, as they left the room together.

They ascended the stairs to the third floor and made their way to the room in which Hal and Miss Clifford had been successively imprisoned.

"I wonder who that other one is," remarked Hal.

"I can't guess. But we'll soon see."

In a moment they had drawn the two bolts of the door and turned the key. The door was flung open. Toby sprang hastily forward.

"Hold up, youngster," cried Hal, catching him by the ear. "I'll treat you to another pinch if you don't keep quiet."

Jack meanwhile advanced into the room in search of its other tenant.

"By the holy pipers!" he cried out in surprise. "So it's you, is it? Come out of that, you terrier pup!"

"Who is it?" cried Hal.

"Jerry Bounce, as I'm a sinner! That's how

Jerry ran away. Locked up here by his kind friends."

"I'll get even with them yet," growled Jerry, as he came forward and brought his evil face into Hal's view.

"I'll tell you how," remarked Hal.

"Speak it out. I'll do it."

"Then all you've got to do is to tell the truth. We've got the pair of them in limbo. And they're going to be squeezed hard and dry. Your only chance to get off is to speak out."

"I'll do it," cried Jerry, savagely.

"How about you, Toby?" demanded Hal.

"That's the hundred shiners old Juddy giv me," growled Toby, pointing to the room. "I'll pay him out, anyhow you say."

"That's prime. What shall we do, Hal? Tie them and leave them with their masters?"

"No, no. They'll be bribed to hold their tongues. Bundle them back here till I can fetch Alderman Jones and some officers. You take care of the crowd, Jack. I'll go for the alderman."

The captives were speedily hustled back into their prison, and Jack left in charge of the captured mansion, while Hal set out on his important mission.

He was absent more than an hour. When he returned he had with him not only Alderman Jones, but also Pat Lyon, and several officers.

These persons were in a state of suppressed excitement at the news of Hal's great capture. It was one of the most important affairs of the year.

"I'm glad you're here," cried Jack Riley. "Them galoos have been trying their level best to buy off the boys. I s'pose they would, too, if I hadn't been about, for boys are human, and a pile of money is worth going for. But just look at my nose, where that devil brung his heel down! I wouldn't let him go for his whole bank."

By this time they had entered the room, where lay the two bound prisoners, watched by their half-dozen of young guards.

The villains grew pale, and turned aside their heads in shame, on recognizing the faces of the men who had entered.

"So!" cried the alderman, fixing his stern eyes on them severely. "The cat's out of the bag now, is it? These are the men who wanted the prosecution pushed against Pat Lyon. To speak truth this isn't the first time I've thought there was a screw loose in that bank. What have you got to say for yourselves, gentlemen?"

The captives kept silence, with their faces turned toward the wall.

"Very well. Here is somebody with a tongue. Where are the proofs of your charge, boys?"

"We heard them say," cried Jack, as he pushed forward with his bleeding face, "that the coast was clear now. And this one said: 'Here is my check for the thirty thousand we made by the bank robbery. Give me the key you kept for security.' Just then Hal and I stepped in, and clapped our fists on the check and the key."

"Where are they?"

"Here."

The two important articles were produced and passed over.

"Is that the key of the bank vault?" asked the alderman, passing it to Pat.

The locksmith looked at it carefully for a minute, and then handed it back.

"Yes," he replied. "That key will fit the lock of the vault."

"Then the case is clear. I will write out a commitment against these men."

All this time the captives had remained mute. They were so utterly overwhelmed by the turn of events that they could not think of a defensive word. They lay as if paralyzed by despair.

Alderman Jones filled two blank warrants, and handed them to two of the officers.

"Execute those," he said, briefly.

He left the room, followed by Pat and one of the officers. Hal and Jack accompanied him.

"That is not all," said Hal, as they proceeded up-stairs. "I heard enough to believe that Judkin was at the bottom of that fire that came so near burning us up. He wanted to get rid of heirs and papers to that strange old property. Hines was the man he was working for. When Hines heard of the fire, and thought that we were all burnt up, he was as glad as if he had been cooking spring chicken for dinner. He said now that all was clear, that he had everything in shape, and would come in as the missing heir."

"I thought that was his plan," remarked Pat.

"Was he one of the executors?" asked Hal, curiously.

"Yes. He had all the proofs in his own hand. He wished to dispose of the true heirs and the other executors, with the papers, and his task would be clear to doctor up a claim to the property, on an older will which was in his favor. He came near it, too. The burning of that house nearly cleared the track for him."

"If Miss Clifford had gone one heir would have been out of the way. Do you know the other heir?" asked Hal, in a peculiar tone.

"No. We have not been able to trace him."

"We have not? Who are we?"

"The other two executors."

"And who are they?"

"Adele Perkins, and Pat Lyon, the locksmith."

Hal fell into a sudden silence. The cat was out of the bag now with a vengeance. So that was what Pat had to do with it? That one answer cleared up many mysteries in Hal's quick mind. So this was at the bottom of the effort to get Pat out of the way, and also of the attempt to make Miss Clifford believe that these two persons were her deadly foes?

Pat smiled as he noticed the boy's preoccupation. He fancied that he had given a settler to his questions.

They had now reached the prison room, and thrown open the door. The two boys were there in eager waiting.

"So, this is the Jerry Bounce that I've had such a hunt for?" remarked the alderman, looking at him curiously. "And this is Toby? A fresh looking pair of young rascals, on my life! Are you ready to tell the truth about the villains who paid you for your services by locking you up here?"

"Yes," cried both boys savagely.

"Then I will take your deposition on the spot."

CHAPTER XXVI.

HEIRS AND EXECUTORS.

A MONTH has passed since the date of the events recorded in the last chapter. But it has been a month full of interest for the characters of our story.

The president and the cashier of the Drover's Bank are both in jail, charged with the robbery of that institution, much to the surprise and horror of the good people of the city. These gentlemen had held their heads so high, and worn such a show of pride and dignity, that one would have sooner thought of George Washington turning burglar.

Yet there could be no question of their guilt. Not only was there the evidence of the check and the key which Hal and Jack had captured, but the two imprisoned boys, Toby and Jerry, had turned State's evidence, and told all they knew about the matter.

Jerry freely acknowledged that it was he who buried the papers in Pat Lyon's yard. They had been given him by Mr. Judkin for that purpose. But, as he was skillful with the pen, he had copied them, and hid the copies. He designed to use the originals to blackmail his employer.

More than this came out. A feeling of terror went through the city when it was learned that the burned house had probably been set on fire by Judkin's agent, for the purpose of destroying its inmates. And the story also ran far and wide of the several efforts to abduct the young lady, by a band of villains employed by the dastardly cashier.

Whispers of a strange mystery got abroad. It became hinted that all these operations had more behind them than a mere vulgar robbery. The story of an ancient estate, of great value, and of the desperate effort of an executor to get rid of all parties concerned, and claim the estate as his own, got abroad.

But the blame for all this was laid on Judkin. The bank president had kept so completely in the background, and done all his work through his tool, that many good people were ready to think that he was the victim of an error, and had been led into a snare by his cashier.

Fortunately for the ends of justice there was the thirty thousand check, and the words heard by the boys, against him.

As for the black-whiskered fellow, who had been Judkin's chief agent in these operations, he had disappeared. From the night of the conflagration, and the arrest of his principal, he had vanished; Philadelphia had grown too hot to hold him.

A month, as we have said, passed away. May Clifford had returned to her former home in Miss Perkins's house. The young lady had got her eyes well opened, and had learned who were her true friends and foes.

She wanted no more to do with Mrs. Wells. Not that she blamed this lady for what had happened, but anybody who could play into the hands of her enemies was no friend for her.

But she had one friend who was a very frequent and welcome visitor. She had not forgotten what had passed between her and Hal Prince on the roof of the burning house, and the love that her eyes had spoken then she had not denied since.

In fact, by the end of the month, she and the handsome 'prentice were declared lovers, with the full consent of Miss Perkins, who had taken a great fancy to Hal from the date of the fire.

The gallant 'prentice seemed to have grown five years older in a month. He had thrown aside his wild and reckless ways, dropped all roughness of language, and was as smooth, polished and devoted a cavalier as the most exacting damsel could demand.

On an evening at the end of the month mentioned Hal and May sat together in the parlor of Miss Perkins's residence, busily engaged in conversation.

They had not come there, however, for the purpose of love-making. There was another ob-

ject in view. The century of the mysterious will had just expired, and Pat Lyon had arranged a conference for the purpose of unfolding this long-concealed secret.

"I presume I must make the most of the present moment," said Hal, pressing the hand of the lovely girl who sat beside him. "You ran away from me on our first interview, and I presume you will again after to-day."

"Why do you say that? I don't show any signs of running, do I?" she asked, with a look of cunning inquiry.

"But after to-day you are to have a pair of million-dollar wings. A poor 'prentice like me can't hope to hold such a lively flyaway as you will be then."

She laughed with gay humor.

"I'll tell you where I will fly."

"Where?"

"Here! I'll make this my nest."

She threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him with an affection that set the happy young fellow's heart beating like a sledgehammer in his breast.

"There! Now don't say anything so disagreeable again."

"I will then. I'll keep saying it, if you'll keep punishing me *that* way. But you don't know everything yet, May. I've got a surprise in store for you."

"A surprise? What is it?"

"Oh, but it's a secret. I can't tell it yet."

"You annoying fellow. You must tell."

"Won't you let me alone?"

"I won't speak to you again if you don't tell me. There now!"

"But there's somebody coming."

"Tell me quick then."

"What would you think, May, if I were to get wings too?"

"What nonsense is that, now?"

Hal laughed in a peculiarly knowing manner.

"Just you wait. You'll see."

Further conversation was interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of Miss Perkins. The lovers hastily drew apart and looked prim and dignified.

Yet Hal's face wore a look of quiet amusement, and May cast a glance of spite on the intruder, who had cut short the revelation of the secret.

"Walk in, gentlemen," said Miss Perkins.

"Mr. Lyon is not yet here, but I expect him at any moment."

Alderman Jones entered the room, in company with several official-looking personages. The worthy magistrate fixed his eyes on the pair who occupied the sofa, and pursed up his lips in a comical manner. Their effort to look unconcerned was a dead failure.

"This is my niece, gentlemen," introduced Miss Perkins. "One of the heirs of the estate. And this is Mr. Prince. I believe you have met him already. Pray be seated. We will talk over the preliminaries while waiting for Mr. Lyon."

They seated themselves accordingly.

"Mr. Lyon has the will," continued Miss Perkins. "But I can give you an idea in advance of its general character."

"We shall be glad to hear it," remarked the alderman.

"It is exactly one hundred years ago to-day since George Gordon died," she began. "He was a gentleman of considerable landed property in the then young city of Philadelphia. After his death his papers were examined. No will was found. But there was a written and attested document to this effect. It stated that he had left a will concealed in a secret place, which place could only be discovered by the aid of a diagram left in the care of one of the gentlemen named as his executors. This will was to be left where he had concealed it, and not disturbed until the end of a century from his death. By that time he expected that his estate would be very valuable. Then it was to be divided between the direct descendants of his two nephews, Herbert Newton and John Price. The document also named three executors, whose descendants were to keep the property in charge, and execute the will at the end of the century. Gentlemen, the century has now ended."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by the entrance of Pat Lyon, who came in with a hasty step and a very self-satisfied countenance.

"I hope you will excuse my delay," he said.

"I have a good excuse for it. I have just had an interview with a member of the board of directors of the Drover's Bank. It has been a very satisfactory one."

"In what way?"

"They ask me to withdraw my suit against the bank for damages. If I consent to do so they will pay me the thirty thousand called for by President Hines's check, on return of that check to the bank."

"The bank cannot have that check," cried Alderman Jones, hastily. "We want that for evidence before the court."

"That was my answer," returned Pat, quietly. "But they have agreed to pay the sum on conditions that I withdraw the suit and return the check after the trial."

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Lyon," ex-

claimed one of the officers. "I'll agree to spend a month in jail myself for half the amount."

A buzz of congratulations followed.

It was ten minutes before they cooled down again to business, and Pat was apprised of what had been said.

"You may go on with the story, Mr. Lyon," said Miss Perkins. "I have only opened the case."

"I can only say that Messrs. Newton and Price were not content with their uncle's will," Pat began. "They wanted the estate themselves, and brought suit to recover it, as the nearest heirs. Then an older will was produced by James Hines, the old gentleman's lawyer, and one of his executors."

"This will resembled the other. But it also declared that, in the event of the loss of the line of the direct heirs, or their failure to prove their descent, the estate should go, after a century, to the direct descendants of said James Hines."

"Aha!" exclaimed the alderman. "This is growing decidedly interesting. So that blocked the suit, eh?"

"Completely. The production of an actual will in court settled their claim in short order. There was no further opposition to Mr. Gordon's wish, and the estate has ever since lain in the hands of the executors."

"Or their descendants?"

"Just so. Two of the descendants are before you, myself and Miss Perkins. The other, named James Hines after his great-grandfather, is in jail."

"But we are not yet at the bottom of the mystery," declared the alderman. "Where are the heirs? Why have they been lost sight of? There has been a loose management of this affair."

"Miss Perkins and I cannot be blamed for that," resumed Pat. "The blame rests with our ancestors. The fact is that Miss Perkins's father and grandfather were sea-captains, while mine were farmers, who settled many miles out of the city. The family of the Hineses continued here in the law business, and the whole management of the estate was left to them. We can understand now why they did not trouble themselves to keep a record of the heirs. It would have suited them precisely if the line of the heirs should vanish, for then the valuable property which they had so long nursed would fall into the hands of a Hines. The hidden will had but to vanish, and the older one would come into effect."

"I see. It was a deeply-played game."

"It was fortunate that my ancestors were more careful," broke in May. "They have kept a strict record of the line of descent which my father carefully transmitted to me. He charged me by all means to carefully guard it. Perhaps he feared a plot to destroy it."

"He wasn't far wrong," broke in Hal. "That is what they tried to get hold of you for. They have failed, however. For here is the record." He laid on the table the oiled silk packet which May had given him.

Pat Lyon took it up, and slowly opened it, while he continued his narrative.

"Miss Perkins and I have for years been residents of the city," he remarked. "But as the estate had been so long in the hands of the Hines family we did not disturb them in their management. In fact, I had no acquaintance with James Hines until I was sent for to open the bank vault. He was much too high and mighty to know a mere locksmith. I was waiting my time. I intended to take down his dignity when the Gordon estate came to be settled."

"Did you suspect nothing wrong?" asked one of the officers.

"No. Miss Perkins did, but I thought she was frightened without cause. You see, each executor had a share of the responsibility. Miss Perkins had charge of this young lady, whom we knew to be one of the heirs. I knew that the will was concealed somewhere in my house. And Mr. Hines had the diagram, which was to indicate the secret hiding-place of the will. I fancied that everything was square."

"I feared something wrong," remarked Miss Perkins. "I began to distrust Mr. Judkin years ago. I never liked him, and I knew he was a mere tool of Hines. For that reason, as the fatal year drew nigh, I removed my niece to the West, and carefully concealed the place of her refuge. She would have escaped all the dangers she has run if she had obeyed my wishes."

"You are right, aunt," said May, hanging her head. "I see how foolishly impatient I was."

"That's only human nature," declared Pat. "I was as foolishly trusting. My eyes were not opened until I found that an effort had been made to find the will, while I and my apprentice were absent. And I perceived more clearly how foolish I had been when I was thrown into prison, and the whole room torn to pieces in a search for it."

"Which was a little too late," suggested Hal.

"That's true, my lad. We owe it to you that the villains' plans have been foiled. Miss Clifford, the heir, owes you a valuable reward for your services."

The look which May cast on her gallant 'prentice

tice was reward enough for him. Her love was worth more to him than her money.

"But there is one loose plank in your bridge," broke in Alderman Jones. "You have told me there are two heirs. Who and where is this second heir?"

"That nobody knows. There may be none. The second line may have run out. What are you looking so confounded knowing about, Hal?"

"I think it's because I am naturally so knowing," answered Hal, whose face wore a peculiar expression. "But go on. Don't mind me!"

"This record may give us the clew," continued Pat, as he opened the bundle of papers that had been wrapped in the silken cover.

It proved to be a series of attestations of court officers, physicians and church wardens, each under due oath and seal, as to the line of descent of two families, those of Herbert Newton and John Price, during the preceding century.

"Here it is drawn out in a family tree," remarked Pat. "There is really only one instead of two lines of descent. It seems that John Price married the daughter of Herbert Newton, so that this record covers both lines. And it is certainly a very narrow family tree. Instead of a host of children there were but two in the last generation, Jacob Clifford and Ellen Braintree."

"Jacob Clifford was my father," remarked May.

"So the record declares. The mystery now is what became of his cousin, Ellen Braintree. It is known that her father left the city thirty years ago, and took her with him. What became of them nobody knows. I have tried to trace them, but so far in vain."

"They must be found," declared the alderman.

"If they can be. What ails you, Hal? You are looking knowing again."

"I was just thinking of a little affair I happened to have in my pocket, which some of you might like to see," he replied demurely.

He drew from his pocket a square leather case, opened it before their curious eyes, and took from it a small medallion portrait, painted on ivory.

"Look at that," he said, handing it to the locksmith.

It was the face of a young and very pretty woman, with strong marks of resemblance to Hal.

"Looks enough like you to be your mother," muttered Pat. "Who is it?"

"You will find the name on the back."

Pat turned and read it; and then a loud cry of astonishment came from his lips.

"Ellen Braintree! Aged fifteen!" he ejaculated. "Why—you rascal—who—"

"It is the portrait of my mother," said Hal, quietly. "And I've a notion that among her papers there is a document something like that you now hold. I told you that I had a little secret, May."

"What! Are you the lost heir?"

"It looks decidedly like it."

"Mercy! Oh, you sly cheat! And to think you kept it from me!"

She ran forward impatiently, tapped him lightly on the cheek, and then seized both his hands in hers, and pressed them with an irrepressible gladness.

"See if I don't punish you for this."

"I hope you will. I like to be punished," he demurely replied.

"But—Hal—" cried Pat, not yet recovered from his astonishment. "But where is your mother? I know that your father came from the West, when he bound you to me."

"She is dead," said Hal, sadly. "I have told you of that before."

"Yes, yes, I forgot. But this is enough to take a man's breath. What do you think, gentlemen? And you, Miss Perkins?"

"I think it has all worked out very neatly," answered the lady, as she looked significantly at the handsome pair, who stood hand in hand.

"I fancy that the estate need not be divided between the two heirs."

That there was an excitement when this surprising news got abroad in the city need not be said.

Hal and his fair cousin, as May had proved to be, were the lions of the hour. It was everywhere voted that their cousinship was too distant to prevent them from being united in a nearer relation, as their great grandfather cousins had been.

But the prentices of the city went actually wild with delight. If one of their number had proved to be the Emperor of Germany they could not have been more gratified, and Hal's nickname of "the Prince" was voted the luckiest title that was ever heard of.

The public excitement was only allayed by its being turned into a new channel, when the two bank officers were put on trial on charge of robbing the bank.

It is not necessary to describe this trial. It will suffice to say that it ended in their being sent to prison for ten years each, at hard labor.

This severe sentence satisfied their foes. No charge was brought against them in regard to

the Gordon estate. And Jerry and Toby were set free in reward for their evidence, and as they had had no part in the robbery.

As for the remainder of our characters, Pat Lyon soon after gave up his locksmith business, and retired on his thirty thousand and his considerable fee as executor of the Gordon estate.

The court had appointed a new executor in the place of James Hines, the convict, and as everything appeared clear the estate was handed over to the two heirs, on their becoming of age, for which they had but a year to wait.

At the end of that year of probation they did more than inherit their million. They joined it and their hands together, in one of the most interesting weddings the growing city had yet known.

At this wedding there was not a prentice in the city that was not a welcome guest, and Hal's house long remained open to his youthful friends. Many of these, indeed, he afterward started in business, and he took good care that none of the lively lads who had done him such good service in fire and peril should ever lack an abundance of the good things of life.

As for Toby and Jerry, however, they worked out their natural destiny, and both found themselves within the walls of the State's prison before they were ten years older.

But of all the wedded pairs in the Quaker City there were none happier than the prentice prince and his lovely bride, and they grew old together in joy and honor, with multitudes of friends, and with new heirs to the great Gordon estate.

THE END.

Dime Dialogues, No. 27.

Patsey O'Dowd's Campaign. 3 males and 1 female.
Hasty Inferences Not Always Just. Numerous boys.
Discontented Annie. For several girls.
A Double Surprise. For four males and one female.
What Was It? For five ladies.
What Will Cure Them. For a lady and two boys.
Independent. For numerous characters.
Each Season the Best. For four boys.
Tried and Found Wanting. For several males.
The Street Girl's Good Angel. 2 ladies & 2 little girls.
A Boy's Plot. For several characters.
"That Ungrateful Little Nigger." For two males.
If I Had the Money. For three little girls.
Appearances Are Deceitful. Several ladies & 1 gent.
Love's Protest. For two little girls.
An Enforced Cure. For several characters.
Those Who Preach and those Who Perform. 3 males.
A Gentle Conquest. For two young girls.

Dime Dialogues, No. 28.

A Test that Told. For six ladies and two gents.
Organizing a Debating Society. For four boys.
The Awakening. For four little girls.
The Rebuke Proper. For 3 gentlemen and 2 ladies.
Exorcising an Evil Spirit. For six ladies.
Both Sides of the Fence. For four males.
The Spirits of the Wood. For two troupes of girls.
No Room for the Drone. For three little boys.
Arm-chair. For numerous characters.
Measure for Measure. For four girls.
Saved by a Dream. For two males and two females.
An Infallible Sign. For four boys.
A good Use for money. For six little girls.
An Agreeable Profession. For several characters.

Dime Dialogues, No. 29.

Who Shall Have the Dictionary? For six males and two females.
The Test of Bravery. For four boys and teacher.
Fortune's Wheel. For four males.
The Little Aesthetes. For six little girls.
The Yes and No of Smoke. For three little boys.
No References. For six gentlemen and three ladies.
An Amazing Good Boy. One male and one female.
What a Visitation Did. For several ladies.
Simple Simon. For four little boys.
The Red Light. For four males, two females, etc.
The Sweetest Thought. For four little girls.
The Inhuman Monster. For 6 ladies and 1 gentleman.
Three Little Fools. For four small boys.
Beware of the Dog! For 3 ladies and 3 "Dodgers."
Bethlehem. For a Sunday-School Class Exhibition.
Joe Hunt's Hunt. For two boys and two girls.
Rags. For six males.

Dime Dialogues, No. 30.

Invisible Heroes. For five young ladies.
A "Colored" Lecture. For four males.
Wishes. For five little boys.
Look at Home. For three little girls.
Fisherman's Luck. For two males and three females.
Why He Didn't Hire Him. For several characters.
A Fortunate Mistake. For six young ladies, etc.
An Alphabetical Menagerie. For a whole school.
The Higher Education. For eight boys.
The Vicissitudes of a Milliner. For six females.
Cat and Dog. For two little ones.
The Aesthete Cured. For 2 ladies and 3 gentlemen.
Jim Broderick's Lesson. For two boys.
The Other Side of the Story. For five females.
The Test that Told. For five males.
Wooing by Proxy. For 2 ladies and 3 gentlemen.
Learning from Evil. For five boys.
The Teacher's Ruse. For ten boys and three girls.
Colloquy of Nations. For eleven personators.
Additional Personations for "Goddess of Liberty."
A scenic piece in Dialogues No. 24.

Dime Dialogues, No. 31.

Barr's Boarders. For various characters.
A Lively Afternoon. For six males.
A New Mother Hubbard. For six little girls.
Bread on the Waters. For four females.
Fornist the Scientists. For two males.
Sloman's Angel. For two males and one female.

What Each Would Do. For six little girls.
Twenty Dollars a Lesson. For eleven males.
Aunt Betsey's Ruse. For 3 females and 1 male.
The Disconcerted Supernaturalist. For one male and audience "voices."
Grandma Grumbleton's Protest. For a "grandma" and several girl grandchildren.
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The Bubble. For two little girls.
Medicine for Rheumatiz. For two "cullud pussons."
That Book Agent! For three males and one female.
The Well Taught Lesson. For five little boys.
A Turn of the Tide. For 3 males and 3 females.
A True Carpet-Bagger. For three females.
Applied Metaphysics. For six males.
What Humphrey Did. For 5 males and 3 females.

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How They See the World. For five little girls.
The Doctor's Office. For several characters male and female.
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Middleton's Mistake. For five males.
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The Man of Cheek. For two males.
Mr. and Mrs. Blizzard at Home. For man and wife.
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The Courtship of Miles Standish. School Festival.

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The Tables Turned. For several males.
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She Had Him Three. For 1 lady and 1 gentleman.
A Report of the Affair. For two gentlemen.
Mrs. Araold's Misconception. For two gentlemen and three ladies.
The Year 'Round. For twelve impersonators.
Defending the Castle. For 2 males and 2 females.
A Perfectly Veracious Man. For 1 male and 1 female.
Sympathetic Sympathy. For 3 males and 2 females.
Ananias at Home. For one male and three females.
The Man from Bangor. 1 gentleman and 3 ladies.
Casabianca in Two Versions. For two boys.

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It's English You Know. For three (or six) males and eight females.
A Much Misunderstood Man. For one male and one female.
The Glass Man. For seven males.
Mrs. Podberry's Views on Education. For two females and several children, girls.
How She Managed Him. For one male, one female, and child.
The Oyster Resurrection. For two males and two females.
A Neighborly Quarrel. For two males.
Blessed are the Pure in Heart. For four females.
What the Boys Knew of it. For a school—all males.
A Warm Reception. For 2 males and 2 females.
Supposings. For ten little girls.
When I Grow up to be a Man. For six little boys.
Enforcing a Moral. For three or four males and several females.
Blaying Big Folks. For several children.
What Are Little Girls Good For? For 9 little girls.
The Bump-Scientist's Reception in Clarionville Center. For 8 males, or 7 males and 1 female.
More Than She Bargained For. For three females and one male.

Dime Dialogues, No. 35.

In the Wrong House. For 2 males and 2 females.
The Sham of It All. For 3 females and 1 male.
The Surest Proof. For several males and one female.
Too Much for Jones and Smith. For two males.
Naughty Boy Blue. For Mother Goose and several children.
Only a Working Girl. For 4 females and 2 males.
How He Got Even with His Enemy. For two males.
Mrs. Bigson's Victory. For one male and one female.
The Mysterious Boarder. For 3 females and 2 males.
The Mugwump Sisters. For a number of females.
Dolly Madison's Method. For 2 males and 1 female.
Miss Lighthouse in the Country. For one male and one female.
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Shoddy and Wool. For five males and six females.
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